

The Book of Nehemiah

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(1996 Study)

The following notes on the Book of Nehemiah were compiled from a Bible study led by Bro. Frank Shallieu in 1996. They should be utilized with the following understanding:

1. Each paragraph preceded by “**Comment**” or “**Q**” (an abbreviation for “**Question**”) was introduced by someone other than Bro. Frank.
2. The original study did not follow a prepared text but was extemporaneous in nature.
3. Although the transcriber tried to faithfully, with the Lord’s help, set forth the thoughts that were presented in the study, the notes are not a verbatim rendering and, therefore, should be considered in that context.
4. Finally, Bro. Frank did not review the notes for possible errors that may have inadvertently entered the text.

With this disclaimer in mind, may the notes be a blessing as a useful study guide.

THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH
(Study led by Bro. Frank Shallieu in 1996)

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

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

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

When Nehemiah inquired, a relative who had returned from visiting Jerusalem informed him of the great trouble there. The wall of the city was broken down, and its gates had been destroyed by fire. Nehemiah received this report in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, which was 454 BC. (The customary 445 BC date is incorrect. As Pastor Russell concluded, the Ptolemy Canon is in error with regard to the date of two kings, the difference being nine years.)

Nehemiah was “in Shushan the palace,” Shushan being the capital of the Persian Empire. Babylon was beyond (east of) the Euphrates River, but Shushan was even farther east beyond both the Tigris and the Euphrates.

Some of the problems that existed when Ezra returned to Jerusalem had been alleviated by his good graces with the same emperor. The time setting was now 82 years after Cyrus’s decree in AD 536 granting permission for Jews to return to rebuild the Temple. Many of the former leading personalities had died: Zerubbabel, Joshua, Haggai, and Zechariah. Ezra was on the scene just 13 years before the Book of Nehemiah begins. Presumably, therefore, Ezra was still alive.

Q: Were there any other prophets on the scene at this time?

A: Yes, but they are not given any special recognition. As we will discuss later, there is a theory about a certain prophet that may be true.

The palace scene in the Book of Esther also took place in Shushan. Esther was alive at this time. Although the Book of Esther follows the Book of Nehemiah, the three individuals—Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther—overlapped to a certain extent.

Nebuchadnezzar attacked the city gates of Jerusalem with battering rams and burned them with fire in 606 BC. Since that time, 152 years had passed (70 years plus 82 years after Cyrus’s decree). Daniel prayed and Cyrus issued his decree. The gates had been in ruins for a century and a half when Nehemiah got the bad news from his relative.

“The remnant that are left of the captivity” refers to the Jews already in Jerusalem.

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

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

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

Nehemiah's prayer reminds us of Daniel's prayer; both included themselves in the prayer of confession. With Daniel, Noah, and Job being singled out for special commendation, we can say that of Daniel and Nehemiah, the former led a more spotless life (Ezek. 14:14,20). It is unusual that Daniel was mentioned before his death as being especially close to God.

There was intensity of prayer with both Daniel and Nehemiah; both fasted and Nehemiah wept. Nehemiah beseeched the "LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible [awesome] God," that is, the all-powerful Potentate in heaven, the implication being that nothing could in any way hinder whatever He should will. Thus Nehemiah was more or less importuning for God's power to be exercised toward His people in their homeland because of the distressing circumstances of harassment from surrounding alien neighbors.

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

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

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

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

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

In this very earnest prayer, Nehemiah called on God's power and hearkened back to the prophecies and warnings of Moses, particularly the "seven times" in Leviticus 26. The blessings were conditional based on obedience.

"O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants." Nehemiah realized he was not the only one praying and distressed. Perhaps when he passed around the news from his relative, others reacted similarly.

"For I was the king's cupbearer." This comment by Nehemiah following his prayer is properly a separate paragraph in the Revised Standard Version. A cupbearer tasted beverages and foods before the king consumed them. "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown" is a famous and true statement, for many people down through history have plotted to take the life of a king, poison being the easiest way. If the vessel was changed during the meal, the cupbearer had to taste the second liquid as well. Cupbearer was a position of great favor and trust because the person had to be present at every meal.

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

been beforetime sad in his presence.

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

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

When Artaxerxes observed the countenance of Nehemiah and asked, "Why are you so sad?" Nehemiah was startled because he was probably trying to force normal behavior. However, the problem in Jerusalem weighed on his mind so much that he could not disguise his feelings.

Comment: It is remarkable that Nehemiah had never previously been sad in the king's presence. That statement says a lot about his demeanor and attitude. Now the results of the fasting and concern showed on his face.

When the king asked about the sad expression, Nehemiah knew that his remarks would be crucial. He simply stated the matter directly.

Q: Did the king have more than one cupbearer?

A: Yes, there would have been at least two cupbearers in case one got sick or died.

Notice Nehemiah's approach: "The *city* [not the Temple], the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire." Cyrus's decree and the reaffirmation by Darius pertained to the Temple, but Nehemiah was beseeching about the gates of the city. The wall mentioned in the Book of Ezra and rebuilt was the wall of the *Temple*, which was three-tiered and was constructed with big beams and heavy stones.

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

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

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

This time Nehemiah's prayer would have been short and quick. Notice how bold he was to ask for a leave of absence for 12 years to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and its walls.

Considering that he was taken by surprise by the king's question, Nehemiah gave excellent answers, which were the product of an orderly mind. When he had heard about the condition of the city walls and gates, he immediately realized what would be entailed in rebuilding them, but he never dreamed the king would ask him what he wanted. As providentially arranged, the queen sitting beside the king was Esther.

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

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

This detailed request gives us insight that Nehemiah had developed a close rapport with the king over the years. No doubt also, Esther and Mordecai had a lot of influence in the king's palace. Otherwise, under normal circumstances, the making of this type of request would result in the king's anger and suspicion of ulterior motives. Kings in those days were very impulsive, so it was dangerous to incur their wrath.

Q: Wouldn't the Lord have put these words in Nehemiah's mouth?

A: Nehemiah must have been thinking along these lines, but when sudden questions confront us, what we have been considering can be forgotten. For instance, we may think beforehand, "If such an occasion arises, I will do thus and so." But then the occasion occurs when we are not expecting it, and we forget what we had previously thought would be a good line of approach. The Lord can help us with words, but we must first put the Scriptures in our memory bank so that He will withdraw them at an opportune moment. If we are negligent, indifferent, or not zealous in our desire to understand Scripture, our recall will be deficient. Even if we do not fully understand the Bible, just getting the words into our head is very important. Then the Lord's Spirit can pull out of our "computer" head the appropriate words for a given occasion.

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

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

Sanballat and Tobiah were anti-Semitic. Letters from the king of Persia were important as Nehemiah traveled through different provinces, and the various governors made haste to help him. The king's own captains and horsemen who accompanied Nehemiah would have had insignias, banners, and colors that impressed onlookers as an official endorsement of the journey. Ezra went back to Israel unaccompanied, but Nehemiah was supplied with captains and horsemen.

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

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

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

The Jews would have noticed Nehemiah's arrival and realized he was an important personage. Meanwhile, Israel's enemies were concerned.

When Nehemiah arose in the night, it was probably a brightly moonlit night so that he could see the condition of the city walls and his horse would not stumble. He must have had a very mathematical mind that enabled him to assess the situation.

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

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

Nehemiah made a complete circuit in his inspection of the walls. He exited from and returned through the same "gate of the valley," or Valley Gate (verses 13 and 15). It is easier to comprehend this point in the Revised Standard Version, for there the gate names have initial capital letters.

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

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

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

"Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me." Nehemiah recounted his experience with the king and told his purpose in inspecting the walls. He must have had a good memory because he subsequently knew how to apportion the work and the responsibility to different ones to repair the walls. He also had an excellent strategy of assigning the particular section of wall repair to those who lived closest to it. In that way, the best work was assured.

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

Neh. 2:20 Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem.

Having the authority of the king, Nehemiah was not concerned that his enemies would send a letter to the king suggesting he was preparing for an insurrection. Therefore, he could address Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem in a firm manner. He said, in effect, that the Jews intended to do this work and that God would prosper it, so Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem should mind their own business and refrain from interfering.

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

The tower of Hananeel is mentioned in Zechariah 14:10 in connection with the coming earthquake: "All the land shall be turned as a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem: and it shall be lifted up, and inhabited in her place, from Benjamin's gate unto the place of the first gate, unto the corner gate, and from the *tower of Hananeel* unto the king's winepresses."

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

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

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

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

This statement that the nobles of the Tekoites did not support the work of their masters shows that some were not in harmony with the effort. In a case like this, if the nobles did not change their attitude, Nehemiah probably made adjustments so that this portion of the wall would not be a weak point.

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

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

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

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

Most of these names are not meaningful to us today. However, earth's history has been recorded on film, and Nehemiah will be seen going out at night to inspect the walls. Since the film will show the ruins as they existed at that time in their unrepaired state, the names recorded here will then become significant.

The thought of a governor's house goes back a long time. The Romans had what was called the Fortress of Antonio next to the Temple area in Jerusalem to control any insurrection that might arise. But that fortress seems to go back much further than the Romans. In other words, the Romans used the same plot and just rebuilt it.

When a person exits the Damascus Gate today, there is a little side entrance, or gate, right next to it that is all filled up. We have never seen it mentioned in any of the guide books, but questions should be answered. What was its purpose? Where is the road that led from it?

Also, the excavation in 200 BC between Golgotha Hill and the outer city wall removed a hill that was higher than the city wall. The Hasmonians realized they were perfectly protected on all sides but the north, so they cut a channel that split Mount Moriah and Golgotha, but it is all the same hill.

Q: Will the future earthquake in Jerusalem fill in Mount Moriah again?

A: The earthquake will make the mount flat on top. The land will be lifted up “as a plain” in preparation for the construction of the Third Temple (Zech. 14:10). Moreover, the alteration of the terrain will make possible the erection of city gates that are equidistant from each other, as stipulated in Ezekiel 48:31-35. Incidentally, in some places the old Temple wall and the city wall are one.

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

Neh. 3:11 Malchijah the son of Harim, and Hashub the son of Pahath-moab, repaired the other piece, and the tower of the furnaces.

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

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

Here a measurement of 1,000 cubits is given. The Valley Gate is the one Nehemiah exited and entered on his circuit of the city to inspect the walls. Both the Dung and Valley gates are on the south side of Jerusalem.

Q: Did some individuals other than Jews help to rebuild the walls?

A: Yes, but their history goes back to David’s and Solomon’s time. In fact, the Gibeonites date back to Joshua. Prophecies of the future mention “strangers” in the land and the fact that they will have equal rights with the Jews in the Kingdom Age because of their ancestry and residency for many years in Jerusalem.

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

Neh. 3:15 But the gate of the fountain repaired Shallun the son of Col-hozeh, the ruler of part of Mizpah; he built it, and covered it, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof, and the wall of the pool of Siloah by the king’s garden, and unto the stairs that go down from the city of David.

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

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

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

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

Neh. 3:20 After him Baruch the son of Zabbai earnestly repaired the other piece, from the

turning of the wall unto the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest.

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

Neh. 3:22 And after him repaired the priests, the men of the plain.

Neh. 3:23 After him repaired Benjamin and Hashub over against their house. After him repaired Azariah the son of Maaseiah the son of Ananiah by his house.

Neh. 3:24 After him repaired Binnui the son of Henadad another piece, from the house of Azariah unto the turning of the wall, even unto the corner.

Neh. 3:25 Palal the son of Uzai, over against the turning of the wall, and the tower which lieth out from the king's high house, that was by the court of the prison. After him Pedaiah the son of Parosh.

Neh. 3:26 Moreover the Nethinims dwelt in Ophel, unto the place over against the water gate toward the east, and the tower that lieth out.

Neh. 3:27 After them the Tekoites repaired another piece, over against the great tower that lieth out, even unto the wall of Ophel.

Neh. 3:28 From above the horse gate repaired the priests, every one over against his house.

Neh. 3:29 After them repaired Zadok the son of Immer over against his house. After him repaired also Shemaiah the son of Shechaniah, the keeper of the east gate.

Neh. 3:30 After him repaired Hananiah the son of Shelemiah, and Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph, another piece. After him repaired Meshullam the son of Berechiah over against his chamber.

Neh. 3:31 After him repaired Malchiah the goldsmith's son unto the place of the Nethinims, and of the merchants, over against the gate Miphkad, and to the going up of the corner.

Neh. 3:32 And between the going up of the corner unto the sheep gate repaired the goldsmiths and the merchants.

Comment: A *Reprint* article suggests a title for each chapter of Nehemiah. "Though historical, this book tells the story of the soul's renewal." The chapter titles are as follows: Chapter 1 - "Conviction and Confession of Sin"; Chapter 2 - "Determination To Build With God's Grace"; Chapter 3 - "Actual Rebuilding of the Soul's Defenses in Sanctification"; Chapter 4 - "Attacks Upon the Soul From Without"; Chapter 5 - "Attacks Upon the Soul From Within"; Chapter 6 - "Sly Temptations of the Adversary Disguised as Reasonableness"; Chapter 7 - "Successful Accomplishment of Spiritual Work in the Soul"; Chapter 8 - "Study of the Word"; Chapter 9 - "Confession of Weaknesses"; Chapter 10 - "Covenant Relationship Emphasized"; Chapter 11 - "Systemizing the Efforts of the Godly Life"; Chapter 12 - "Acknowledgment of God in Everything"; Chapter 13 - "A Sad Exhibition of the Christian's Fall and Renewed Influences of the Spirit." The first three chapters seem to fit the description.

Reply: That article was written by a person who used the soul, the inner man, the new creature, to draw lessons on the entire Book of Nehemiah, but I think it is a stretch of the imagination and entering the realm of fantasy to do that with mathematical chapters.

However, chapters like the fourth one, which describes the opposition of Sanballat, lend themselves to spiritual parallels. There are good lessons, but the entire book should not be forced into a nice little outline of the soul's experience. Israel's temptations in the wilderness and the 42 stops are another matter, for they can be spiritualized.

Q: Would the spiritual lesson of this chapter be that we all have a job to do?

A: That would be the general lesson. When it comes to dealing with certain matters, each ecclesia is responsible for its own area—for the repair of doctrine, moral problems, etc. Otherwise, we would all be spiritual policemen for everyone, and with more bad news than good news, we would be like the newspapers, which publish nothing but problems and troubles. The new creature cannot develop if it continually thinks of what is wrong and what must be corrected.

Comment: Verse 20 reads, "After him Baruch the son of Zabbai *earnestly* repaired the other piece." The NIV has "*zealously* repaired another section." The others all built, but Baruch earnestly built.

Reply: The temperaments of people differ. Some are outgoing and exuberant. Others are serious but can be just as earnest. What is remarkable is that here is an individual who did with his whole heart, or spirit, what he was charged to do by Nehemiah. Many built the wall only out of a sense of duty, so to build with enthusiasm was admirable.

Comment: That is one difference between the Little Flock and the Great Company.

Neh. 4:1 But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews.

Neh. 4:2 And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?

The running conflict with Sanballat, Tobiah, and others had been going on for some time. The intent of Sanballat's sarcasm in verse 2 was to weaken the focus or diminish the attention of the returned Jews on repairing the wall and to make them regard the task as impossible.

At that time, Nehemiah was probably the most fit man among the Jews to handle the problems connected with rebuilding the wall. His abilities were outstanding. Ezra was perhaps superior along moral and character lines, but Nehemiah excelled in judgment, savvy, Persian training, and organizational ability.

Sanballat's mockery indicates the degree of utter ruin that must have existed. The Jews themselves probably felt the project was overwhelming, but eventually they finished the rebuilding of the wall in just *52 days*—a miraculous time period considering the immensity of the task.

Q: Why were Sanballat and Tobiah so tenacious in their opposition to the Jews?

A: Their people had been placed in the land much earlier, and in spite of Ezra's actions, intermarriage occurred subsequently between the Jews and these alien people. When the heathen wives were put away earlier, they went beyond the immediate environs of Jerusalem to settle. Jews living there again intermarried, this time with the Samaritans. Although the Samaritans believed in only one God, their religious beliefs and practices were a mixture and

not wholly in accord with Jewish ones. When Sanballat was rebuffed time and again, he resorted to all kinds of strategy against Nehemiah.

Neh. 4:3 Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall.

Tobiah accompanied Sanballat and was in full sympathy with his remarks. Tobiah was saying that in spite of all the Jews' efforts to rebuild the wall, there were so many cracks and holes that foxes could get through them. Even when portions of the wall were finished, the gates were not set in place, so the gateways remained as openings. However, Nehemiah had a reason for the openings and a strategy on how to deal with them.

Neh. 4:4 Hear, O our God; for we are despised: and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity:

Neh. 4:5 And cover not their iniquity, and let not their sin be blotted out from before thee: for they have provoked thee to anger before the builders.

Verses 4 and 5 are Nehemiah's response, or prayer, to God. He beseeched the Lord not only to counteract the methods of Sanballat and Tobiah but also to bring retribution upon them. Nehemiah was stirred up, saying, "They have provoked thee [God] to anger." In other words, their words were a reflection on God.

Neh. 4:6 So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work.

"All the wall was joined together unto the half thereof"; that is, the wall was built to "half its height" (RSV). This was another reason the gates had not yet been put in place.

Neh. 4:7 But it came to pass, that when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth,

Neh. 4:8 And conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it.

First, Sanballat and Tobiah were angry. Now they had gotten others to join the chorus of opposition (Arabians, Ammonites, and Ashdodites), and the others were angry as well. As a result, a conspiracy was formed against the Jews.

Neh. 4:9 Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them.

The Jews continued in earnest prayer.

Neh. 4:10 And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall.

The people of Judah were discouraged because so much rubble had to be cleared away before the wall could be rebuilt. Since most of the returned Jews were from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, this attitude affected many people. Therefore, the short 52-day rebuilding period to finish the wall was very crucial. With Christians, as well as with temporal things like sports, the last effort of expended energy is what makes the difference between victory and defeat. Judah

was fatigued, and the work yet to be accomplished was immense.

Neh. 4:11 And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease.

The strategy of the foes was to infiltrate the Jews through the open gateways and then kill the Jews when they were off guard through concentrating on their part of the rebuilding project. The enemies felt that their similar appearance would make infiltration easy.

Neh. 4:12 And it came to pass, that when the Jews which dwelt by them came, they said unto us ten times, From all places whence ye shall return unto us they will be upon you.

Those who planned to infiltrate came from all sides, but Nehemiah realized their strategy and thus devised a counterstrategy for protection.

Neh. 4:13 Therefore set I in the lower places behind the wall, and on the higher places, I even set the people after their families with their swords, their spears, and their bows.

Neh. 4:14 And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses.

Nehemiah divided the people into work crews (masons) and guards (both on top and at the base of the wall). He set sentinels, including wives and children. Those who were not actively employed were armed. Jews at the base of the wall were secreted so that when those on top of the wall spotted someone coming through the opening and warned, those at the base jumped out and killed the intruder. Nehemiah's methods kept the strategy of infiltration from working.

Next Nehemiah reminded the Jews of the great miracles God had done on their behalf in Egypt and at the Exodus. He said in effect, "Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and do not let this hostile environment scare or unnerve you."

Neh. 4:15 And it came to pass, when our enemies heard that it was known unto us, and God had brought their counsel to nought, that we returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work.

Neh. 4:16 And it came to pass from that time forth, that the half of my servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons; and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah.

"Habergeons" are coats of mail. The enemies realized their plan had been discovered when they saw sentinels on the wall. Thus the strategy of infiltration fell flat. The account does not reveal how Nehemiah got the information.

Neh. 4:17 They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon.

Neh. 4:18 For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. And he that sounded the trumpet was by me.

Nehemiah gave advice to the Jews that when any threat came upon them from any quarter,

the first to be informed should be Nehemiah himself, for he was the center of command. With haste the information was given to Nehemiah, and a man who sounded the trumpet of alarm was next to Nehemiah. Messages were thus conveyed with the trumpet, for the location of the danger was communicated with a particular sound. What great organization Nehemiah had!

At first, half of the Jews worked, and the other half carried weapons. Later they could relax somewhat, and more of the people were involved in the labor. As danger arose, however, accommodation was made to prepare for attack.

Neh. 4:19 And I said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, The work is great and large, and we are separated upon the wall, one far from another.

Neh. 4:20 In what place therefore ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us: our God shall fight for us.

Neh. 4:21 So we laboured in the work: and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared.

The Jews were separated far from one another because the city was large and the wall was long. Also, the hilly terrain was fatiguing. Evidently, the trumpeter went to the location of the danger, and there he sounded the instrument. The Jews then went quickly to where the sound was coming from for defensive purposes.

If a city was attacked at night, the attackers were like sitting ducks coming over the wall as long as the inhabitants of that city were alert. On a moonlit night, an offensive attack was even more difficult.

Neh. 4:22 Likewise at the same time said I unto the people, Let every one with his servant lodge within Jerusalem, that in the night they may be a guard to us, and labour on the day.

Neh. 4:23 So neither I, nor my brethren, nor my servants, nor the men of the guard which followed me, none of us put off our clothes, saving that every one put them off for washing.

The Jews who defended the city were not merely the inhabitants of Jerusalem but also the people from outlying districts. The Jews from outside Jerusalem provided relief for guard duty so that those who worked all day had a decent night's sleep. And those who worked during the day—inhabitants of Jerusalem—were defending their own homes. The Jews from outside brought provender and food and provided relief in such daily tasks.

The wall was built of large stones. First, and for the most part, all usable stones were salvaged from the rubble. In addition, some quarrying was done, and stones were brought into Jerusalem. Cedars were also brought in to serve as beams to strengthen the wall internally.

Neh. 5:1 And there was a great cry of the people and of their wives against their brethren the Jews.

Neh. 5:2 For there were that said, We, our sons, and our daughters, are many: therefore we take up corn for them, that we may eat, and live.

Neh. 5:3 Some also there were that said, We have mortgaged our lands, vineyards, and houses, that we might buy corn, because of the dearth.

Food was a problem because when the people were building the wall, they were not planting

and harvesting crops. Every able-bodied person with strength was engaged in building and/or using defensive weapons. The rest of the Jews—the old, the young, and the women—had to support the workers and builders, so they started to sell and barter their possessions for food for themselves and the men who were building. They did not trade and sell to their enemies but to the Jews outside Jerusalem. The families of those who lived in the city were in hard straits because it was their menfolk who were defending and building. Hence they had to depend on their fellow Jews outside the city for help. But the Jews outside Jerusalem began to exact usury on their own brethren who were engaged in the Lord's work of rebuilding the wall. Some of the Jews inside the city even had to sell their own children as servants to Jews outside the city in order to get provender. This was just one of the problems that Nehemiah had to solve.

Neh. 5:4 There were also that said, We have borrowed money for the king's tribute, and that upon our lands and vineyards.

Neh. 5:5 Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children: and, lo, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants, and some of our daughters are brought unto bondage already: neither is it in our power to redeem them; for other men have our lands and vineyards.

That which formerly belonged to these Jews was now mortgaged, and some became slaves instead of being masters of their own homes. Of the 42,000 Jews who returned to Jerusalem, some were poor, and some were very wealthy (Ezra 2:64). When the king of Persia said the Jews could return, they were expected to pay a tax on the properties in Israel. In other words, they were allowed to go back, but the land was not theirs because it theoretically belonged to the Persian Empire. However, the rich Jews took over the leases of the poorer Jews, and the poorer Jews were in dire straits because not only did they have to provide food for themselves but they had to pay the land tax that was now mortgaged to their fellow brethren.

Neh. 5:6 And I was very angry when I heard their cry and these words.

How did Nehemiah react when he heard these things? He was "very angry."

Neh. 5:7 Then I consulted with myself, and I rebuked the nobles, and the rulers, and said unto them, Ye exact usury, every one of his brother. And I set a great assembly against them.

Neh. 5:8 And I said unto them, We after our ability have redeemed our brethren the Jews, which were sold unto the heathen; and will ye even sell your brethren? or shall they be sold unto us? Then held they their peace, and found nothing to answer.

Ezra combated the problems he faced along moral lines by his own humiliation, remorse, tears, and the rending of his garments. Nehemiah used a different strategy: anger. It was righteous indignation like that of Moses many centuries earlier. Nehemiah mixed anger with reason and also assembled others to whom he spoke strongly. "Usury! Why, that is against the law of Moses!"

Nehemiah himself, as the king's cupbearer, was very wealthy, as we will see later in the book. But he used his wealth in many "philanthropic" ways. He and others of the nobility whom he persuaded redeemed those Jews who had been sold to their enemies. "We after our ability have redeemed our brethren the Jews, which were sold unto the heathen; and will ye even sell your brethren?" They gave of their own money to redeem their brethren in alien captivity (among the Ammonites, Ashdodites, etc.), and here, among Jewry, were Jewish slaves to other Jews. Nehemiah must have been truly furious as he said in effect, "Here we are redeeming

Jews, and you are making slaves of your own people!” The message got across, so that “then held they their peace, and found nothing to answer.” Strategy, shame, and indignation were all effective in putting those Jews in their place. Elsewhere we are told that Nehemiah took his wealth and distributed it as best he could to shame the people.

Neh. 5:9 Also I said, It is not good that ye do: ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies?

Neh. 5:10 I likewise, and my brethren, and my servants, might exact of them money and corn: I pray you, let us leave off this usury.

Neh. 5:11 Restore, I pray you, to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their oliveyards, and their houses, also the hundredth part of the money, and of the corn, the wine, and the oil, that ye exact of them.

Notice, Nehemiah said, “*Today, right now, from this moment on*, restore their lands, vineyards, olive yards, and houses.” When Ezra went back, those who were in leadership positions got stipends from the Persian government. The Jews who remained in Babylon, as well as the Persian government, furnished a dowry, as it were, and an annual salary. But now Nehemiah was saying, “I have no such salary. As governor of Jerusalem, I am entitled by the Persian government to exact taxes from you, but I am living off my own wealth.” Nehemiah shamed the Jews to give back not only the land but also a “hundredth part” (or 1 percent) of the usury.

Neh. 5:12 Then said they, We will restore them, and will require nothing of them; so will we do as thou sayest. Then I called the priests, and took an oath of them, that they should do according to this promise.

Neh. 5:13 Also I shook my lap, and said, So God shake out every man from his house, and from his labour, that performeth not this promise, even thus be he shaken out, and emptied. And all the congregation said, Amen, and praised the LORD. And the people did according to this promise.

How wonderful! Nehemiah relied not only on the power of shame but also on the strategy of making the people take an oath to God before the priests. He realized that emotionalism was not enough. The oath was necessary lest they forget.

Comment: It is like our consecration vows. They are to God, and despite the emotionalism in the beginning, they are lifelong vows.

Reply: Yes, thousands may respond to a Billy Graham crusade, for example, but the solemnity of the vow is the binding influence. Those who sincerely respond know the vow is not to be taken lightly.

Then Nehemiah demonstrated by shaking his lap (similar to the way we might shake off an insect). He said, “May God do this to any of you who do not fulfill your oaths!” Nehemiah spoke, acted, and made the Jews sign on the dotted line, as it were. “And all the congregation said, Amen, and praised the LORD. And the people did according to this promise.”

Neh. 5:14 Moreover from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year even unto the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that is, twelve years, I and my brethren have not eaten the bread of the governor.

Nehemiah was the governor.

Neh. 5:15 But the former governors that had been before me were chargeable unto the people, and had taken of them bread and wine, beside forty shekels of silver; yea, even their servants bare rule over the people: but so did not I, because of the fear of God.

Zerubbabel was one of the “former governors.” There was nothing wrong with receiving a stipend and exacting taxes, especially if a person did not have the means. The Apostle Paul made tents to earn money, but he said that one who labored in the Word could receive support.

Neh. 5:16 Yea, also I continued in the work of this wall, neither bought we any land: and all my servants were gathered thither unto the work.

Neh. 5:17 Moreover there were at my table an hundred and fifty of the Jews and rulers, beside those that came unto us from among the heathen that are about us.

Neh. 5:18 Now that which was prepared for me daily was one ox and six choice sheep; also fowls were prepared for me, and once in ten days store of all sorts of wine: yet for all this required not I the bread of the governor, because the bondage was heavy upon this people.

Neh. 5:19 Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.

Nehemiah’s own entourage numbered more than 150 princes and rulers who had been associated with him when he was cupbearer. Daily he supported them with food.

Nehemiah had been on a leave of absence for 12 years. Shortly he would return to Persia.

Neh. 6:1 Now it came to pass, when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian, and the rest of our enemies, heard that I had builded the wall, and that there was no breach left therein; (though at that time I had not set up the doors upon the gates;)

Neh. 6:2 That Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono. But they thought to do me mischief.

These same three enemies kept trying to frustrate the work of Nehemiah. The wall was complete at this point without breaches, but the gate openings were not finished. Hence the enemies had failed to stop the building of the wall.

Now a new strategy was being devised by the enemy to defeat Nehemiah. The plan was to lure him out from the confines of the city to meet on the plain of Ono. However, Nehemiah realized that this ostensible truce and discussion would actually be a trap for assassinating him.

Neh. 6:3 And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?

Neh. 6:4 Yet they sent unto me four times after this sort; and I answered them after the same manner.

Here we see the persistence of the enemy. The world, the flesh, and the devil continually oppose the people of God. The four attempts show the perseverance of Sanballat and company, but Nehemiah kept responding with the same resoluteness about being heavily engaged in the work and too busy to meet with them. But he was also utilizing the further

strategy of not answering these enemies in too blunt a fashion lest they use his answers as an occasion and rallying cry to assault the city. Nehemiah's answer was truthful, yet at the same time, he saw through their treachery.

Neh. 6:5 Then sent Sanballat his servant unto me in like manner the fifth time with an open letter in his hand;

Neh. 6:6 Wherein was written, It is reported among the heathen, and Gashmu saith it, that thou and the Jews think to rebel: for which cause thou buildest the wall, that thou mayest be their king, according to these words.

Neh. 6:7 And thou hast also appointed prophets to preach of thee at Jerusalem, saying, There is a king in Judah: and now shall it be reported to the king according to these words. Come now therefore, and let us take counsel together.

Now, the fifth time, Sanballat sent a letter to Nehemiah saying that a report would be sent to the king of the Persian Empire, informing him that Nehemiah and the Jews planned to rebel. A king would have to be very fair-minded to not be immediately angered over such a report. Many problems both among Christians and in the world are caused by second-, third-, and fourth-hand misinformation.

Comment: The fact that the wall was rebuilt in just 52 days and that during such a short time five attempts were made to derail the plans shows the determination of the enemy and how little time passed between the attacks.

Sanballat hoped that the fifth stratagem of the open letter would strike fear in Nehemiah's heart, for the situation would be serious if Artaxerxes believed the rumor. The name of a witness, Gashmu, was used to give credibility to the report. This same type of accusation was used by the Jewish priesthood to try to change Pilate's defense of Jesus: "We have no king but Caesar." When rumors got back to unjust, impulsive Roman emperors, such as Nero or Caligula, that one of the provinces was planning an insurrection, they did not take time to investigate the matter but quickly dispatched armies to quell it. The priesthood's implication at the First Advent was that Pilate's position as governor of Judea would cease if he did not act. The strategy eventually worked. First, Pilate ordered that Jesus receive stripes, and then he remanded Jesus over for crucifixion. Satan uses such methods with fallen human beings to further his schemes.

Neh. 6:8 Then I sent unto him, saying, There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart.

Neh. 6:9 For they all made us afraid, saying, Their hands shall be weakened from the work, that it be not done. Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands.

With the time constraint and the desperation to finish the work, Nehemiah uttered just a short prayer. We, too, pray in our hearts and minds on the spur of the moment when we are in a special difficulty or trial where we cannot pray at length privately. Nehemiah prayed for God's help in accomplishing the work and in overcoming the fear of others.

Sanballat was threatening to report the false matter, but Nehemiah knew that by the time the report reached Artaxerxes and a contingent of soldiers could be sent to Jerusalem to stop the supposed rebellion, the wall would already be finished.

The very fact that the letter was open was an affront, for in ancient times, when a letter was

sent to a person of repute, to a person in an honorable office, it was sealed. Sanballat intentionally sent an open letter to discourage not only Nehemiah but also anyone taking the letter to him. Sanballat knew that word would spread as to the nature of the letter.

Neh. 6:10 Afterward I came unto the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah the son of Mehetabeel, who was shut up; and he said, Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us shut the doors of the temple: for they will come to slay thee; yea, in the night will they come to slay thee.

Neh. 6:11 And I said, Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in.

Neh. 6:12 And, lo, I perceived that God had not sent him; but that he pronounced this prophecy against me: for Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him.

This strategy came from an enemy within. Sanballat and Tobiah had paid this individual to entice Nehemiah into the Temple behind closed doors. But Nehemiah was a sufficiently noble character not to be concerned with only his own personal safety. He realized his responsibility as leader of the returned Israelites.

Pretending to be a prophet, this individual “pronounced this prophecy” against Nehemiah as if he had received some special communication of warning. Again Nehemiah saw through the strategy.

Neh. 6:13 Therefore was he hired, that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin, and that they might have matter for an evil report, that they might reproach me.

Here was another evil strategy to frustrate Nehemiah’s work. Imagine having all of these experiences again and again! And Ezra was similarly assaulted earlier.

Neh. 6:14 My God, think thou upon Tobiah and Sanballat according to these their works, and on the prophetess Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets, that would have put me in fear.

In addition to Shemaiah, the prophetess Noadiah and other prophets tried to instill fear in Nehemiah. In other words, pressure was being brought to bear on him.

Neh. 6:15 So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days.

Neh. 6:16 And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God.

Comment: The wall was finished in 52 days, and the fact that all of the enemies and the heathen “perceived that this work was wrought of our God” meant they would incur particular responsibility if they continued to oppose the Jews. They recognized God’s hand in the matter.

Neh. 6:17 Moreover in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters unto Tobiah, and the letters of Tobiah came unto them.

Neh. 6:18 For there were many in Judah sworn unto him, because he was the son-in-law of Shechaniah the son of Arah; and his son Johanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah.

In other words, Tobiah was trying to get the nobles of Judah to pressure Nehemiah. Verse 18 shows there was intermarriage. Berechiah was in the priesthood.

Neh. 6:19 Also they reported his good deeds before me, and uttered my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to put me in fear.

Many nobles in Judah “reported his [Tobiah’s] good deeds” to Nehemiah. They were trying to persuade Nehemiah that he was mistaken about Tobiah and that he should cooperate with him. Tobiah (and others) were the “Canaanites” in the land.

In regard to building the wall, we can draw lessons about the old man reasoning with the new creature. Peter tells us to add to our faith “virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity” (2 Pet. 1:5-7). And so, when the Scriptures list various characteristics God wants us to develop, that is our “building the wall.” The brotherhood are involved in the building, for we are to build up one another in the most holy faith. The tactics of the Adversary may be suited to a particular occasion, but they are always the same. Thus we can see the pressure that was exerted on Nehemiah, but his focus of attention was to accomplish the building of the city wall. When that was fully accomplished and the gates were set in place, he had other work to do.

Comment: The nobles knew this was God’s work, yet because of family relationships, they were willing to go along with Tobiah.

Neh. 7:1 Now it came to pass, when the wall was built, and I had set up the doors, and the porters and the singers and the Levites were appointed,

Neh. 7:2 That I gave my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the ruler of the palace, charge over Jerusalem: for he was a faithful man, and feared God above many.

With his 12-year leave of absence expiring, Nehemiah handed over some of his authority to Hanani and Hananiah, whom he felt were trustworthy, faithful men who “feared God above many.”

Neh. 7:3 And I said unto them, Let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun be hot; and while they stand by, let them shut the doors, and bar them: and appoint watches of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, every one in his watch, and every one to be over against his house.

Neh. 7:4 Now the city was large and great: but the people were few therein, and the houses were not builded.

Why were the gates kept shut until the sun was hot? (1) If the gates were opened before full daylight, the enemy would be able to invade. (2) By that time, all of the Jews were awake, out of bed, and alert. Thus not only the watchmen but also the entire populace would be on guard. Watches were appointed day and night at the different gates with relief perhaps every three or four hours.

The city was large since the walls were built on the old perimeter. Instead of the hundreds of thousands of Jews who formerly inhabited Jerusalem, there was now just a relative handful. Therefore, a smaller number had to defend a rather large area.

And there was another problem. The city wall was complete, but the people had not been able

to finish their own houses. They knew the location of their lots, however, because earlier each person was instructed to defend that part of the wall where his unfinished house was. (That psychology gave the people additional incentive to protect the city.) Moreover, Jerusalem was in ruins. That is why the rubble of the broken-down walls had to be cleared before they could be rebuilt.

Nehemiah had a very orderly mind. He realized the importance of building the protective wall before working on individual houses.

As new creatures, we have a wall that needs to be built before certain other things can be done. That wall, or defense, is the conscience, and extreme care must be taken not to violate our conscience. As our conscience is educated and developed to know good from evil, we are alerted to danger. To have an educated conscience is of *primary* importance, and after that, the “house” is built.

Neh. 7:5 And my God put into mine heart to gather together the nobles, and the rulers, and the people, that they might be reckoned by genealogy. And I found a register of the genealogy of them which came up at the first, and found written therein,

Neh. 7:6 These are the children of the province, that went up out of the captivity, of those that had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and came again to Jerusalem and to Judah, every one unto his city;

Nehemiah got the commission, or decree, to build the city walls in 454 BC, which was the twentieth year of Artaxerxes. Now it was 12 years later (442 BC) and time for him to return to Artaxerxes. Those who came to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel did so in 536 BC. With this time lapse, children and grandchildren had been born among the returned Jews.

Now Nehemiah began to retrace the lineage of those who had returned with Zerubbabel.

Neh. 7:7 Who came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, Baanah. The number, I say, of the men of the people of Israel was this;

Neh. 7:8 The children of Parosh, two thousand an hundred seventy and two.

Neh. 7:9 The children of Shephatiah, three hundred seventy and two.

Neh. 7:10 The children of Arah, six hundred fifty and two.

Neh. 7:11 The children of Pahath-moab, of the children of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand and eight hundred and eighteen.

Neh. 7:12 The children of Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four.

Neh. 7:13 The children of Zattu, eight hundred forty and five.

Neh. 7:14 The children of Zaccai, seven hundred and threescore.

Neh. 7:15 The children of Binnui, six hundred forty and eight.

Neh. 7:16 The children of Bebai, six hundred twenty and eight.

- Neh. 7:17** The children of Azgad, two thousand three hundred twenty and two.
- Neh. 7:18** The children of Adonikam, six hundred threescore and seven.
- Neh. 7:19** The children of Bigvai, two thousand threescore and seven.
- Neh. 7:20** The children of Adin, six hundred fifty and five.
- Neh. 7:21** The children of Ater of Hezekiah, ninety and eight.
- Neh. 7:22** The children of Hashum, three hundred twenty and eight.
- Neh. 7:23** The children of Bezai, three hundred twenty and four.
- Neh. 7:24** The children of Hariph, an hundred and twelve.
- Neh. 7:25** The children of Gibeon, ninety and five.
- Neh. 7:26** The men of Bethlehem and Netophah, an hundred fourscore and eight.
- Neh. 7:27** The men of Anathoth, an hundred twenty and eight.
- Neh. 7:28** The men of Beth-azmaveth, forty and two.
- Neh. 7:29** The men of Kirjath-jearim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred forty and three.
- Neh. 7:30** The men of Ramah and Gaba, six hundred twenty and one.
- Neh. 7:31** The men of Michmas, an hundred and twenty and two.
- Neh. 7:32** The men of Beth-el and Ai, an hundred twenty and three.
- Neh. 7:33** The men of the other Nebo, fifty and two.
- Neh. 7:34** The children of the other Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four.
- Neh. 7:35** The children of Harim, three hundred and twenty.
- Neh. 7:36** The children of Jericho, three hundred forty and five.
- Neh. 7:37** The children of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred twenty and one.
- Neh. 7:38** The children of Senaah, three thousand nine hundred and thirty.
- Neh. 7:39** The priests: the children of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred seventy and three.
- Neh. 7:40** The children of Immer, a thousand fifty and two.
- Neh. 7:41** The children of Pashur, a thousand two hundred forty and seven.
- Neh. 7:42** The children of Harim, a thousand and seventeen.

Neh. 7:43 The Levites: the children of Jeshua, of Kadmiel, and of the children of Hodevah, seventy and four.

Neh. 7:44 The singers: the children of Asaph, an hundred forty and eight.

Neh. 7:45 The porters: the children of Shallum, the children of Ater, the children of Talmon, the children of Akkub, the children of Hatita, the children of Shobai, an hundred thirty and eight.

Neh. 7:46 The Nethinims: the children of Ziha, the children of Hashupha, the children of Tabbaoth,

Neh. 7:47 The children of Keros, the children of Sia, the children of Padon,

Neh. 7:48 The children of Lebana, the children of Hagaba, the children of Shalmal,

Neh. 7:49 The children of Hanan, the children of Giddel, the children of Gahar,

Neh. 7:50 The children of Reaiah, the children of Rezin, the children of Nekoda,

Neh. 7:51 The children of Gazzam, the children of Uzza, the children of Phaseah,

Neh. 7:52 The children of Besai, the children of Meunim, the children of Nephishesim,

Neh. 7:53 The children of Bakbuk, the children of Hakupha, the children of Harhur,

Neh. 7:54 The children of Bazlith, the children of Mehida, the children of Harsha,

Neh. 7:55 The children of Barkos, the children of Sisera, the children of Tamah,

Neh. 7:56 The children of Neziah, the children of Hatipha.

Neh. 7:57 The children of Solomon's servants: the children of Sotai, the children of Sophereth, the children of Perida,

Neh. 7:58 The children of Jaala, the children of Darkon, the children of Giddel,

Neh. 7:59 The children of Shephatiah, the children of Hattil, the children of Pochereth of Zebaim, the children of Amon.

Neh. 7:60 All the Nethinims, and the children of Solomon's servants, were three hundred ninety and two.

Neh. 7:61 And these were they which went up also from Tel-melah, Tel-haresha, Cherub, Addon, and Immer: but they could not show their father's house, nor their seed, whether they were of Israel.

Neh. 7:62 The children of Delaiah, the children of Tobiah, the children of Nekoda, six hundred forty and two.

Neh. 7:63 And of the priests: the children of Habaiah, the children of Koz, the children of Barzillai, which took one of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite to wife, and was called

after their name.

Neh. 7:64 These sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but it was not found: therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood.

Neh. 7:65 And the Tirshatha said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and Thummim.

“Tirshatha” was the office of governor, and Nehemiah filled that office at this time.

It is interesting that some genealogy records existed. Those of the Levites who did not have a register were forbidden certain liberties until the priest came with the Urim and Thummim. At that time, these parties would be examined, and the Urim and Thummim would indicate yes or no. Evidently, when Joshua was high priest earlier, he did not have the Urim and Thummim.

Three major waves of Jews returned to Jerusalem. The first wave consisted of those with Zerubbabel, the second with Ezra, and the third with Nehemiah. Therefore, about three generations were involved.

In the chronology in the *Second Volume*, the genealogy is traced from Genesis, going from father to son. In the Period of the Kings, the length of each king’s reign is used, bringing us down to 536 BC, the date at which secular history becomes reliable.

Regarding Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, some old-time Bible scholars felt that Nehemiah was Malachi. Tradition also supports this thought. Malachi 1:1 gives no genealogy but just states simply, “The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi.”

When the Bible is read verse by verse, perhaps only 10 percent of the information is retained. Notice how the Bible is arranged. The sequence is 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. These Old Testament *historical* books are grouped together. Next comes the grouping of poetic books: Job, Psalms, and Proverbs. But that does not mean each book is in sequence—the *groups* are in sequence but not the individual books, for some of the books overlap in time.

Neh. 7:66 The whole congregation together was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore,

Neh. 7:67 Beside their manservants and their maidservants, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven: and they had two hundred forty and five singing men and singing women.

The 42,360 are mentioned again. However, there are differences between this listing and the earlier listing of names in the second chapter of Ezra, and hence there are differences when the numbers are added up. It is important to realize, though, that the differences can be adjusted to show there is no contradiction. The point of listing the names twice is to have two witnesses. The very fact the names are duplicated means that the listings are important in God’s sight. Evidently, the two listings are recorded for future use.

Neh. 7:68 Their horses, seven hundred thirty and six: their mules, two hundred forty and five:

Neh. 7:69 Their camels, four hundred thirty and five: six thousand seven hundred and twenty asses.

Neh. 7:70 And some of the chief of the fathers gave unto the work. The Tirshatha gave to the treasure a thousand drams of gold, fifty basins, five hundred and thirty priests' garments.

The three major Tirshathas (governors) were Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. The Tirshatha at that time donated to the treasury.

In the lessons that the Pastor drew, Nehemiah was likened to Jesus. Hence we can read into the book some antitypical lessons about the battles of the New Creation and Jesus' responsibilities. The Adversary tempted Jesus just as Nehemiah was assailed.

Jesus' character was such that he hated evil, whereas we must develop that hatred. We like our own flesh and reasoning, but these must be kept under. The lessons Jesus learned as the Logos helped to carry him through the Crucifixion. "By his [previous] knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many [on the Cross]" (Isa. 53:11). Previous knowledge of the Father's thinking sustained him.

Neh. 7:71 And some of the chief of the fathers gave to the treasure of the work twenty thousand drams of gold, and two thousand and two hundred pound of silver.

Neh. 7:72 And that which the rest of the people gave was twenty thousand drams of gold, and two thousand pound of silver, and threescore and seven priests' garments.

Neh. 7:73 So the priests, and the Levites, and the porters, and the singers, and some of the people, and the Nethinims, and all Israel, dwelt in their cities; and when the seventh month came, the children of Israel were in their cities.

Neh. 8:1 And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel.

Neh. 8:2 And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month.

Ezra the scribe opened "the book of the law of Moses," which had been located in a storage facility of the Persian government and given to Ezra. The people were in high expectation as to what would be read. It is interesting that they stood "together as one man," showing there was a unity of attention. This mixed congregation, consisting of men and women and those who could understand, were all focused on this event.

Neh. 8:3 And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law.

The wording of verse 2 is duplicated here and in subsequent verses to emphasize that the people were attentive and could understand. The point is that those with understanding have a responsibility, especially if they are the Lord's people. Being Jews, they were baptized under the cloud and in the Red Sea at the time of the Exodus. Having made a covenant as a nation, they were the people of God.

Another lesson is the importance and increased responsibility of a person's conduct after consecration. Hence the distinction between the consecrated and the unconsecrated should be noted in our thinking and judgment lest matters get blurred and problems arise. To be

willingly ignorant is no excuse. It is possible for people capable of understanding to be willingly ignorant by closing their ears to the Lord's instruction.

Neh. 8:4 And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, and Shema, and Anaiah, and Urijah, and Hilkiah, and Maaseiah, on his right hand; and on his left hand, Pedaiah, and Mishael, and Malchiah, and Hashum, and Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam.

Neh. 8:5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up:

Ezra had assistants and associates with him for the three-hour continuous sermon on this very momentous occasion (see verse 3). "All the people stood up" in a respectful, attentive attitude. Even tradition tells much about Ezra and his respect for and devotion to the Word of God. While on an elevated pulpit, Ezra opened the book ceremoniously and conspicuously in the sight of all the people.

Neh. 8:6 And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

Neh. 8:7 Also Jeshua, and Bani, and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, caused the people to understand the law: and the people stood in their place.

"Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God." When Ezra opened the book, he offered a prayer of praise and acknowledgment. The people responded enthusiastically, "Amen! Amen!" as if to say, "What we are hearing is very precious."

Under Moses the Law was read once every seven years; this ceremony kept in remembrance the importance of the whole Word of God as it was then revealed. Probably Ezra read a verse or a short portion of text and then paused while the individuals listed in verse 7 explained what had just been read. "Also Jeshua, and Bani, ... Pelaiah, and the Levites" has the thought of "even the Levites," meaning that the individuals who are named as helping "the people to understand the law" were Levites. Others may even have taken a turn reading.

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

Neh. 8:9 And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law.

"So they read ... distinctly." The verses and portions of Scripture were providentially read by those whose voices could be heard distinctly.

The reading took place on the first day of the seventh month (verse 2), which was the Feast of Trumpets. In one sense, the first seven months of the Jewish calendar represented the entire year. Other feasts also occurred during that portion of the year.

In regard to the Christian Church, the antitype of the seventh month would be the Harvest period. In the type, a trumpet was blown at the beginning of each of the first seven months, representing messages to the Church down through the Gospel Age. The seventh month

signifies the opening up or uncovering of truth not previously seen. Great light shone in both the first and the seventh months, that is, in the days of the apostles and during the Harvest. During the Dark Ages, a spiritual fog covered the earlier truths.

In addition, there is another lesson or antitype along a broader line: the opening of truth to the world. When the Kingdom is inaugurated, the people will be heavily instructed in the meaning of God's Word, particularly along moral lines and along the lines of obedience and ceremonies that are to be performed under the New Covenant. The New (Law) Covenant will be very similar to the old Law Covenant, at least during the Kingdom Age.

The Tirshatha, or governor, was Nehemiah at that time. As the scribe, Ezra the priest was in a relatively subordinate role. In the Kingdom, the Ancient Worthies will occupy the more important role as princes; nevertheless, the Zadok priesthood, who will officiate in the Third Temple, will assist in the understanding of God's Word.

"This day is holy unto the LORD your God." In other words, this was a time of *jubilation*. In the antitype, the Jubilee day of a thousand years began in 1874, the start of the Harvest. Today, however, the Day of Atonement, the tenth day of the seventh month, is preceded by nine days of seriousness and soul-searching for the Jew.

Ezra told the people, "Mourn not, nor weep." Why did the people weep? Because they were so unfamiliar with what the Law taught and they now realized how far they had departed from its precepts. Remember, there was an 82-year gap between 536 BC, when the first Jews returned from Babylon to Jerusalem, and 454 BC, when Nehemiah got permission in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes to return to build the walls of the city. Now Nehemiah's leave of absence was expiring.

The progression of rebuilding was to be (1) the altar, (2) the Temple platform, (3) the Temple, and (4) the walls of Jerusalem. The attention of the people would next be directed to their own homes.

Neh. 8:10 Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength.

Neh. 8:11 So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be ye grieved.

Neh. 8:12 And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.

The people were not only capable of understanding, but they did understand. And there was "great mirth [happiness]."

Comment: In the antitype, the people in the Kingdom will say, "This is the God we have waited for!" Many will appreciate finally getting a clear message. Jeremiah 31:34 states, "They shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD."

Reply: Yes, and as verse 10 shows, there will be "a feast of fat things." "And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined" (Isa. 25:6). The fruitage of the development of the Church will bring a reward and blessing to the people under the

ministration of Messiah.

Neh. 8:13 And on the second day were gathered together the chief of the fathers of all the people, the priests, and the Levites, unto Ezra the scribe, even to understand the words of the law.

Neh. 8:14 And they found written in the law which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month:

On the second day of the seventh month, a more elite group, the leaders, “gathered together ... to understand the words of the law. And they found written in the law....” This was exciting—they “found” the Lord’s instruction. Prior to consecration, many of us had certain experiences to prepare us to be responsive to the message of truth when it came. Perhaps, for example, it was a conflict of conscience or a particular hunger for understanding. Then along came a message of truth that was sweet like honey in the mouth. Of course later on, the message was bitter in the belly because there is a price to pay with regard to truth (Rev. 10:9,10). But compared with the reward afterward, the suffering is not even worthy of consideration. “Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life” (Matt. 7:14), but what a life it is! The Christian walk has its struggles but also its joys.

These leaders found that the Feast of Succoth (Booths, Tabernacles, Ingathering) instituted back in Moses’ day had been neglected for years. It was to be observed on the fifteenth day of the seventh month. The first day of the seventh month was the new moon, the Feast of Trumpets; the tenth day was the Day of Atonement; and the fifteenth day was the Feast of Tabernacles. The Day of Atonement is not mentioned here.

Comment: It is interesting that from the standpoint of the antitype, the Feast of Tabernacles is singled out in Zechariah 14:16,17 as being mandatory in the Kingdom.

Reply: Yes, the requirement will be for representatives from all governments, or nations, to go year by year to the Temple in Jerusalem to pay obeisance to the Lord. So important is this requirement that a nation who refuses to send a representative will receive no rain.

Neh. 8:15 And that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written.

Neh. 8:16 So the people went forth, and brought them, and made themselves booths, every one upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God, and in the street of the water gate, and in the street of the gate of Ephraim.

At that time and under that period of development of the literal rebuilding of the city, the streets of the Water Gate and the Gate of Ephraim were wider and clearer than the other streets, so the people could set up booths, or temporary shelters, there. This practice, or observance, dates back to the Exodus.

Q: The Revised Standard Version uses “square” for “street.” Is “square” accurate?

A: The actual word is probably “street,” but “square” makes sense as a broad place, that is, a wider street.

Neh. 8:17 And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths: for since the days of Jeshua the son of Nun unto that day

had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness.

Neh. 8:18 Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according unto the manner.

In other words, the people went back to the Law of Moses. There was to be a solemn gathering on both the first day and the eighth day.

Earlier Zerubbabel was the governor, and Joshua was the priest. Now Nehemiah was the governor, and Ezra was the priest.

Neh. 9:1 Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them.

In the twenty-fourth day of the seventh month, in connection with the assembly described in the previous chapter, the Israelites were fasting and praying with sackcloth and ashes, or dirt, as symbols of humbling themselves. Such demonstrativeness, if done with genuine feeling and spirit, is a good sign.

Comment: This assembly followed the Feast of Tabernacles, so the people were already prepared mentally.

Reply: Yes, that feast introduced this current period of time. The eighth day was a solemn occasion.

Neh. 9:2 And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers.

“Strangers” were the surrounding heathen people, including wives and children. Earlier, under Ezra’s command, the Israelites had put aside their heathen wives and children, but this verse intimates that they fell back into the same sin. The wives were either new ones or the previous wives reinstated. In any event, the good intentions manifested under Ezra gave way to the same situation under Nehemiah. Thus Nehemiah’s influence was along the same lines as Ezra’s.

Neh. 9:3 And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the LORD their God one fourth part of the day; and another fourth part they confessed, and worshipped the LORD their God.

Ezra came on the scene in the seventh year of Artaxerxes. Nehemiah arrived in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, which was 13 years later. Now Nehemiah’s 12-year leave of absence had almost expired, so it was nearly 25 years after Ezra’s arrival.

The first three verses of this chapter tell the events of the day; the details follow. On days previous to the twenty-fourth day, the Law was read and the people wept because so much had been overlooked and forgotten. (Back in Babylon the Law was lost sight of until it was found and given to Ezra.) Now on the twenty-fourth day, the reading continued.

For one-fourth part of the day (six hours), the Law was read. For a second fourth part of the day (six hours), the people confessed and worshipped. In other words, *for 12 hours*, for the daylight period from sunrise to sunset, the people met to gain more familiarity with the Lord’s Word and commands and to have a prayer session. With the fasting, there were no meal breaks.

Neh. 9:4 Then stood up upon the stairs, of the Levites, Jeshua, and Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani, and cried with a loud voice unto the LORD their God.

On a grandstand, or stage area, were eight Levites who stood up to instruct the people in a generalized sense. They “cried with a loud voice unto the LORD their God” in an emotional prayer to create the proper mood of reverence and attentiveness.

Neh. 9:5 Then the Levites, Jeshua, and Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabniah, Sherebiah, Hodijah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said, Stand up and bless the LORD your God for ever and ever: and blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise.

Most of the names are the same. Those that differ may be another way of mentioning the surname, for in Babylonian captivity those in leadership positions had at least two names. The three Hebrews in Daniel 1:7 are an example: “Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abed-nego.” Incidentally, the fact that so many names are listed in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah indicates they will be used for reference at some future time.

Neh. 9:6 Thou, even thou, art LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee.

The eight Levites continued, acknowledging that God is the Creator: “Thou, *even thou*, art JEHOVAH alone.” In other words, the power or attribute of God as Creator is *His alone*.

In this group prayer, the eight recognized the past history of Israel and confessed the sins and shortcomings of the people, as subsequent verses will show.

Neh. 9:7 Thou art the LORD the God, who didst choose Abram, and broughtest him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees, and gavest him the name of Abraham;

These details were mentioned because the Levites saw a similarity. Just as Abraham came out of Ur of the Chaldees into the Land of Promise, so the Israelites came out of Babylon into the Promised Land. The sentiment was, “Not only art thou the God who brought Israel out of Egypt, and Abram and company out of Ur of the Chaldees, but you have brought us out into this situation. We are praising you for this circumstance in our lives.”

Neh. 9:8 And foundest his heart faithful before thee, and madest a covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Jebusites, and the Girgashites, to give it, I say, to his seed, and hast performed thy words; for thou art righteous:

Neh. 9:9 And didst see the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, and heardest their cry by the Red sea;

Egypt was called the “furnace of affliction” and the “house of bondage” (Deut. 4:20; Isa. 48:10; Exod. 13:3). In Babylon too, the Israelites suffered affliction and restrictions. With the Israelites being independent spirits, they were of a different attitude, and they felt the restrictions more keenly than other subjugated peoples. The Jews were very high-spirited, and those who wanted to serve God acceptably, as in days of old, felt acutely the bondage in Babylon where the climate was not conducive to worship.

Abraham is an example of one who was high- and independent-spirited. He left his wealth in Ur of the Chaldees. True, he brought animals and servants with him, but he left behind comfort and security, home and lands. Tradition says that Abraham and his father Terah felt discomfited in Babylon along religious lines because of the idolatry. Therefore, when God called Abraham to leave Ur, he was ready to obey. And so, the Book of Ezra tells of Jews who left Babylon (1) under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua and (2) a little later with Ezra.

Similarly, the call is for the Spirit-begotten in mystic Babylon to come out and leave “idolatrous” conditions behind. Because of friendship and family ties, most will not leave until they are forced to do so at the time of the nominal system’s fall.

Neh. 9:10 And showedst signs and wonders upon Pharaoh, and on all his servants, and on all the people of his land: for thou knewest that they dealt proudly against them. So didst thou get thee a name, as it is this day.

Neh. 9:11 And thou didst divide the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land; and their persecutors thou threwest into the deeps, as a stone into the mighty waters.

Verses 10 and 11 are a review of what God did to Israel’s enemies at the time of the Exodus. The returned captives were probably reacquainted with the Book of Exodus, for surely with six hours of reading each day, the Pentateuch was covered. The eight Levites providentially selected to read would have spoken very clearly and powerfully.

Neh. 9:12 Moreover thou leddest them in the day by a cloudy pillar; and in the night by a pillar of fire, to give them light in the way wherein they should go.

Neh. 9:13 Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments:

Neh. 9:14 And madest known unto them thy holy sabbath, and commandedst them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses thy servant:

Neh. 9:15 And gavest them bread from heaven for their hunger, and broughtest forth water for them out of the rock for their thirst, and promisedst them that they should go in to possess the land which thou hadst sworn to give them.

Neh. 9:16 But they and our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to thy commandments,

Neh. 9:17 And refused to obey, neither were mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them; but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage: but thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not.

The rebellious Israelites “appointed a captain to return to their bondage.” The Old Testament account does not give the name of this individual who was appointed in the wilderness to take the place of Moses and lead the people back to Egypt.

Comment: Numbers 14:4 tells that after the spies brought back an unfavorable report of the enemies in the Promised Land, the people “said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.” The next verse tells that the people were not able to carry out this idea

because “Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel” and spoke to them.

The Lord had warned the Israelites in Leviticus 26 that if they were disobedient, they would be punished. If the Israelites repeatedly failed to get the lesson, then “seven times” of punishment would be visited upon them. Various captivities were allowed to take place, but not of such long duration that they could not observe their Jubilees. Eventually, however, they went into the 70-year Babylonian captivity. Certainly a 50-year Jubilee had to expire while the Israelites were outside their homeland. Thus the long 2,520-year punishment started in 606 BC.

The Israelites’ recognition of their past history in the day of Ezra and Nehemiah was to their credit. Unfortunately, that attitude is not manifested in Israel today. In fact, a few years ago the chief of Israel’s Supreme Court wrote a treatise to the effect that the people had done nothing wrong and that their troubles were the result of prejudice and anti-Semitism on the part of Gentiles. Yet several times in the Old Testament, God Himself called the Israelites stiff-necked and said that He would punish them for their disobedience. Today in Israel we hear nothing along this line. Moreover, if someone reminded the Jews of their past history, they would accuse the individual of not having a loving attitude. We can surmise that repentance will have to precede Israel’s being fully received back by the Lord. There has to be a change of attitude for that reconciliation to take place. Zechariah 12:10 states, “And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.”

Thus public cognition was given to Israel’s sins, and God was asked for help. The prayer was that His Word would dwell in the Israelites so that they could perform. Such was the spirit of the Levites who offered the prayer, and the public was in agreement, at least temporarily.

Comment: In support of the statement that the Israelites had a proper repentant attitude at that time, God’s mercy is mentioned multiple times in this chapter of Nehemiah. This generation had endured captivity in Babylon, yet they recognized God’s mercy and did not feel sorry for themselves. Their attitude and spirit were commendable as they kept saying that God is patient, full of mercy, gracious, and slow to anger.

Reply: We would think that the Jews living in Israel today would declare a national fast to beseech God for guidance in regard to the problems with the PLO. Down through their history of favor, God raised up individuals who had the right attitude. Daniel and Ezra are examples of such individuals.

Neh. 9:18 Yea, when they had made them a molten calf, and said, This is thy God that brought thee up out of Egypt, and had wrought great provocations;

The long prayer continued, confessing that the history of the Israelites contained much disobedience. Those offering the prayer wanted to start with a new slate.

The golden calf, the new god in the wilderness, represented Papacy. And so, it has been in the Gospel Age. Instead of recognizing God as the Father of the calling and Jesus as the Captain of the Christian’s salvation, Papacy, as the man of sin, has led a rebellion (2 Thess. 2:3).

Neh. 9:19 Yet thou in thy manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness: the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to show them light, and the way wherein they should go.

Neh. 9:20 Thou gavest also thy good spirit to instruct them, and withheldest not thy manna from their mouth, and gavest them water for their thirst.

God's "manifold mercies" were displayed in that despite the Israelites' disobedience, He continued the arrangements for their protection, such as the cloud and the manna. These are good things for us to think about as individuals, for sometimes we misconstrue providences and gain the wrong lesson from them. In any event, God continued to guide, cover, protect, feed, and water the Israelites according to their needs.

With human nature being what it is, if the wrong principle were entertained even on a very small scale and someone in a fit of temper discontinued his largesse to another person along these lines, it would probably be said, "That person deserves what he is getting." But the Lord continued to extend mercy and was not emotional. A clear head is needed to judge a matter properly and to make right decisions, for once emotion enters the picture, judgment tends to be faulty. Only in situations of obvious gross sin should emotion—righteous indignation—be manifested. For example, Moses acted properly when he was angry over the golden calf, and Jesus properly cast out the money changers. We should likewise act peremptorily and forcefully in such matters, but when judgment pertains to the life, or existence, of another personality, we must tread cautiously and not proceed according to emotion. We should not push a blind man off a cliff.

Neh. 9:21 Yea, forty years didst thou sustain them in the wilderness, so that they lacked nothing; their clothes waxed not old, and their feet swelled not.

It was truly a miracle that the Israelites' clothing and sandals did not wear out and that their feet did not swell.

Neh. 9:22 Moreover thou gavest them kingdoms and nations, and didst divide them into corners: so they possessed the land of Sihon, and the land of the king of Heshbon, and the land of Og king of Bashan.

Neh. 9:23 Their children also multipliedst thou as the stars of heaven, and broughtest them into the land, concerning which thou hadst promised to their fathers, that they should go in to possess it.

God multiplied the Israelites "as the stars of heaven." We usually apply this term to the Christian portion of the Abrahamic promise, to the spiritual seed, but here it is given a natural application. The point to remember is that God was not speaking in verse 23 but the group of eight Israelites, who were recognizing the wrongs committed and how God was merciful to the nation, so that they multiplied and prospered as a people "as the stars of heaven." Multiplication "as the sand of the sea" would be a more proper figurative application here.

The same principle of an inaccurate statement being made is illustrated with Thomas. Thomas said that unless he could thrust his hand into Jesus' side, he would not believe. When Jesus appeared to him later and told Thomas to put his hand in Jesus' side, the apostle fell down and said, "My Lord and my God!" Because Thomas uttered those words under *emotional* circumstances, we are not to conclude from those words that Jesus is God. The account is simply stating a historical fact. When the apostles spoke according to the Holy Spirit, such as at Pentecost or in written epistles, then their words are to be given weight as being infallible.

Neh. 9:24 So the children went in and possessed the land, and thou subduedst before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gavest them into their hands, with their kings, and the people of the land, that they might do with them as they would.

Neh. 9:25 And they took strong cities, and a fat land, and possessed houses full of all goods, wells digged, vineyards, and oliveyards, and fruit trees in abundance: so they did eat, and were filled, and became fat, and delighted themselves in thy great goodness.

Neh. 9:26 Nevertheless they were disobedient, and rebelled against thee, and cast thy law behind their backs, and slew thy prophets which testified against them to turn them to thee, and they wrought great provocations.

In spite of the Lord's goodness to them and the rich provisions, in spite of their new abode wherein they appropriated the land and reaped that which others had sown, the Israelites became disobedient. That is the way flesh goes, given time.

Neh. 9:27 Therefore thou deliveredst them into the hand of their enemies, who vexed them: and in the time of their trouble, when they cried unto thee, thou heardest them from heaven; and according to thy manifold mercies thou gavest them saviours, who saved them out of the hand of their enemies.

This verse pertains to the Period of the Judges. The word "judge" has a connotation of fear, generally speaking, but the Pastor said that Israel's judges were really saviors. And that is what verse 27 is saying: "according to thy manifold mercies thou gavest them *saviours*, who saved them out of the hand of their enemies." Of course to those who are openly and blatantly wicked, a judge should cause fear.

Neh. 9:28 But after they had rest, they did evil again before thee: therefore leftest thou them in the hand of their enemies, so that they had the dominion over them: yet when they returned, and cried unto thee, thou heardest them from heaven; and many times didst thou deliver them according to thy mercies;

Neh. 9:29 And testifiedst against them, that thou mightest bring them again unto thy law: yet they dealt proudly, and hearkened not unto thy commandments, but sinned against thy judgments, (which if a man do, he shall live in them;) and withdrew the shoulder, and hardened their neck, and would not hear.

Comment: Verses 26 and 29 say that God testified against the Israelites with the purpose of bringing them back to Him.

Reply: Yes, it was like a parent punishing a child with the intent that the child should recognize wrongdoing and thus get the lesson.

Comment: Today, among ourselves, when a comment is made toward someone who is doing wrong, it is important to remember that the purpose is to bring that person back to the Lord.

Reply: Yes, in such cases, the long-term outlook (a person's destiny) is more important than the short term. We do not want to see someone go into Second Death, and this type of straying starts gradually. This gliding into wayward paths begins with little violations, but in time the conscience gets seared, losing its sensitivity. The conscience no longer reacts properly as a mechanism to guide us into thinking, saying, and doing that which is right in God's sight.

Sometimes an unruly, spoiled child resents the rod, even when it is justifiably applied by the parent. Proverbs 22:6, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it," indicates that the majority of children, if properly raised, will be "good citizens." But with a few that is not true, for such children harbor real anger and hatred toward

the parent. If, as the *Sixth Volume* suggests, the discipline is applied early in life, there is apt to be less resentment. Also, some children do not need the rod at all. A parent may have five children, and all five can have different personalities. One of those children may always be obedient with just the raising of the voice being a sufficient correction. With another child, even shouting is not effective, for he reasons that the parent's bark is worse than his bite.

Neh. 9:30 Yet many years didst thou forbear them, and testifiedst against them by thy spirit in thy prophets: yet would they not give ear: therefore gavest thou them into the hand of the people of the lands.

The Israelites resented the prophets who gave proper advice, yet God's Spirit was speaking through their mouth.

Neh. 9:31 Nevertheless for thy great mercies' sake thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for thou art a gracious and merciful God.

Neh. 9:32 Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the terrible God, who keepest covenant and mercy, let not all the trouble seem little before thee, that hath come upon us, on our kings, on our princes, and on our priests, and on our prophets, and on our fathers, and on all thy people, since the time of the kings of Assyria unto this day.

The northern kingdom went into captivity more than a hundred years earlier than Judah. This captivity occurred at the hand of Assyrian kings, whereas Judah and Jerusalem later went into Babylonian captivity.

This long lament in reviewing Israel's history started with the Exodus. The Period of the Judges was mentioned next and then the Period of the Kings. Judgments came on both Israel and Judah, but when the history of Kings and Chronicles is read carefully, the Lord's judgments on the northern kingdom seem to be a little more severe because the ten tribes developed spiritual pride based on their numbers. They multiplied greatly and were very affluent. Riches and goods are a danger to spiritual development. Those of Judah were not innocent, but God spared them for more than a century because there were degrees of obedience.

Verses 31 and 32 again emphasize God's mercy: "for thy great mercies' sake," "thou art a gracious and merciful God," "our God, ... who keepest covenant and mercy."

Neh. 9:33 Howbeit thou art just in all that is brought upon us; for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly:

Neh. 9:34 Neither have our kings, our princes, our priests, nor our fathers, kept thy law, nor hearkened unto thy commandments and thy testimonies, wherewith thou didst testify against them.

To the credit of the eight Levites, this is strong language about the Israelites' disobedience. When the history of Israel is viewed from a purely dispassionate standpoint, without emotion, the nation as a whole is not to be praised. However, if God had not permitted sin and evil for a time, how would we know about His love? Without these acts of mercy, we would have no way of knowing His motives and that He is a God of love. Not understanding God, Satan really thought he was right when he questioned God's motives to Eve. Therefore, with the permission of evil, we can see God's love. To see Jesus suffer on the Cross and die for man's sin reveals the *depth* of God's love. This act exposes His character as no other method could have.

Although God has long patience, it is not unending, for in time He will destroy the incorrigibly

wicked. Many misunderstand His patience and purposed delay as an inability to act and a lack of interest. To properly interpret providence is difficult, but the Bible enlightens us on God's thinking, and the Law of Israel reveals His principles.

Neh. 9:35 For they have not served thee in their kingdom, and in thy great goodness that thou gavest them, and in the large and fat land which thou gavest before them, neither turned they from their wicked works.

Neh. 9:36 Behold, we are servants this day, and for the land that thou gavest unto our fathers to eat the fruit thereof and the good thereof, behold, we are servants in it:

This long prayer reminds us of Stephen's review of Israel's wayward history, for which he was stoned (Acts 7). Many think of Israel's prophets as being mean-spirited for enumerating the people's transgressions. Generally speaking, people do not like instruction.

Comment: Jeremiah repeatedly tried to convert the people, but they were always angry at him.

Reply: His ministry was viewed in a negative light, and he almost gave up at one time, thinking he should keep his mouth shut. But the spirit within him was like a live coal that could not be contained. On the other hand, Isaiah often spoke on uplifting themes and restitution, but whenever he preached otherwise, the people were angry. According to tradition, he died by being sawn in half.

Neh. 9:37 And it yieldeth much increase unto the kings whom thou hast set over us because of our sins: also they have dominion over our bodies, and over our cattle, at their pleasure, and we are in great distress.

Comment: Verse 37 refers to the Israelites' dissatisfaction with having judges and their wanting a king like the surrounding heathen nations. Through Samuel, God warned Israel of the consequences of their having a king.

Reply: Yes, and initially Saul seemed to be a fit king.

Neh. 9:38 And because of all this we make a sure covenant, and write it; and our princes, Levites, and priests, seal unto it.

Verse 38 is saying that a covenant, a vow, was being made and sealed. Group, or plural, leadership was properly speaking as the voice of the people. "We have done all these things and we are to blame, yet you have shown us great mercy" was their repentant attitude. That was also the sentiment of the listening congregation, for the prayer was not just the attitude of one leader but a general consensus. Nehemiah's reform work was successful for a short time.

Q: With this group prayer, would the eight Levites have spoken alternately with the Holy Spirit overruling so that their words came out sequentially?

A: Yes, and this group leadership consensus probably reflected the pent-up feelings of many of the hearers.

Neh. 10:1 Now those that sealed were, Nehemiah, the Tirshatha, the son of Hachaliah, and Zidkijah,

Neh. 10:2 Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah,

Neh. 10:3 Pashur, Amariah, Malchijah,

Neh. 10:4 Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch,

Neh. 10:5 Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah,

Neh. 10:6 Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch,

Neh. 10:7 Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin,

Neh. 10:8 Maaziah, Bilgai, Shemaiah: these were the priests.

Neh. 10:9 And the Levites: both Jeshua the son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel;

Neh. 10:10 And their brethren, Shebaniah, Hodijah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan,

Neh. 10:11 Micha, Rehob, Hashabiah,

Neh. 10:12 Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah,

Neh. 10:13 Hodijah, Bani, Beninu.

Neh. 10:14 The chief of the people; Parosh, Pahath-moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani,

Neh. 10:15 Bunni, Azgad, Bebai,

Neh. 10:16 Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin,

Neh. 10:17 Ater, Hizkijah, Azzur,

Neh. 10:18 Hodijah, Hashum, Bezai,

Neh. 10:19 Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai,

Neh. 10:20 Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir,

Neh. 10:21 Meshezabeel, Zadok, Jaddua,

Neh. 10:22 Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah,

Neh. 10:23 Hoshea, Hananiah, Hashub,

Neh. 10:24 Hallohesh, Pileha, Shobek,

Neh. 10:25 Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah,

Neh. 10:26 And Ahijah, Hanan, Anan,

Neh. 10:27 Malluch, Harim, Baanah.

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

law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, every one having knowledge, and having understanding;

Neh. 10:29 They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, and his judgments and his statutes;

Comment: The end of verse 28 is interesting: "every one having knowledge, and having understanding." Those who took this oath were of the age of responsibility; they knew what they were doing.

Reply: Yes, and the oath followed eight days of public reading of the Law. The people responded favorably by entering anew into the Law Covenant, rededicating themselves as God's people to walk in His paths. Not babies but those of reasonable age took the oath. There is a responsibility in committing one's life to the Lord.

Q: Does the word "curse" in verse 29 mean a covenant?

A: Yes. In Leviticus 26, Moses informed the Israelites of the troubles (curses) they would have if they forgot God's Law. He told them that they would be taken into various captivities and finally into the "seven times" punishment (the Diaspora) if they disobeyed. To the contrary, obedience would bring prosperity and temporal blessings. Of course the time setting of Nehemiah is many, many years later. The point here is that the Israelites knew what their commitment to God meant: blessing or cursing.

Comment: The terminology is unusual: "They ... entered into a curse ... to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD."

Reply: Jesus said, "If any man wants to follow me, he should first sit down and count the cost because making a commitment is a serious matter. It is a narrow way." Even if one enters into a commitment emotionally, halfheartedly, and without thinking, there is still responsibility, and failing to see that responsibility could lead to Second Death. On another occasion, Jesus spoke the opposite way, saying that God does the calling and that with the present time being so favorable, an individual would be foolish not to heed the call. God would not call someone unless He knew that person could make his calling and election sure by trusting *in Him*, having a *continuing* faith, and *living* by faith. Another time a man said to Jesus, "Let me bury my father, and then I will follow you." Jesus replied, "Let the dead bury the dead."

Jesus' admonitions were the opposite of the attitude of evangelists who play on emotion and urge numbers of people to come forward in an altar call. If a person does not first sit down and count the cost, he may later try to say, "I did not know what I was doing." If not checked, such thinking leads to renouncing the commitment to serve the Lord.

In the Law, a negative judgment is almost always expressed for those who do not heed the instructions. Therefore, the purpose of the eight days of reading and instruction was to familiarize the returned Jews with the Law. Those who explained the Law gave both the pros and the cons but emphasized the pros. Verse 29 is saying that the people realized they were making a serious commitment, and if they did not keep the commitment, curses would come upon them. In principle, Jesus gave instruction along this same line on at least one occasion. Ezra was open in giving instruction, whereas Nehemiah was not, for although this is the Book of Nehemiah, the instruction was done by the Levites, the priests.

In the Old Testament, the word "accursed" ("devoted" in the King James margin) can be used

as either a curse or a blessing depending on context. The account of Achan in the Book of Joshua uses this Hebrew word *cherem* (Josh. 7:1,11-13,15).

Q: Do personal agreements with the Lord have to follow special wording, or are they expressions within the heart?

A: There are different types of commitment. A formal commitment is done soberly in the hearing of others, whereas personal intentions of an individual, such as New Year's resolutions, may be completely private and secret. With regard to the latter, the flesh is powerful and fallen, so in perhaps 99 percent of the cases, the person does not necessarily improve as the year passes. However, such resolutions are informal and not before the Lord. Thus there are various levels of commitment, such as wishes, intentions, resolutions, and vows.

Comment: In a previous study, advice was given that it is better to leave the marriage vow simple, as it has been for generations. If words are added to the vow, more responsibility is placed upon the two individuals. Hence there are more opportunities to break the vow and thus incur condemnation.

Reply: Yes, simple is better. Our eye should be eye, and our nay should be nay (Matt. 5:37). It is important to be true to our word.

Neh. 10:30 And that we would not give our daughters unto the people of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons:

Neh. 10:31 And if the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the sabbath day to sell, that we would not buy it of them on the sabbath, or on the holy day: and that we would leave the seventh year, and the exaction of every debt.

Non-Israelite itinerant "salesmen" kept intruding on the sabbath, so that eventually the city gates were closed on those days to prevent the selling of wares. The commandment to keep the sabbath holy means to take off at least one day a week to think especially about God.

What is the thought of leaving "the exaction of every debt"? Every seventh year the Israelites were to release debts. "At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release. And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbour shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, or of his brother; because it is called the LORD'S release" (Deut. 15:1,2). The fiftieth year of release was the Jubilee.

Q: Wasn't the land supposed to rest every seven years too?

A: Yes. Farmers rotationally rest their land so that each year crops can be grown on the part not resting. This cycle, or count, of seven is found in nature, mathematics, and language. For example, the cells of the body are renewed every seven years—but little by little in a staggered fashion so that not all cells are renewed at the same time.

Comment: The need for the land to rest should tell the person who has any common sense that there is a God. How could one believe that this cycle just happened without Divine intelligence?

Neh. 10:32 Also we made ordinances for us, to charge ourselves yearly with the third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God;

Neh. 10:33 For the showbread, and for the continual meat offering, and for the continual burnt offering, of the sabbaths, of the new moons, for the set feasts, and for the holy things,

and for the sin offerings to make an atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God.

When the Israelites left Egypt, a half shekel had to be given in recognition of each firstborn having been purchased. Now an extra third of a shekel was to be given annually. This arrangement gave the Temple economy a sudden burst of energy and supply. In other words, a Temple tax was agreed to in order to supply animals for offerings made by the high priest on behalf of the people. The people's responsibility was to provide funds so that the priesthood and Levites could carry out the offerings in an orderly fashion on holidays and feast days.

Q: Is verse 32 saying that the people agreed to extra, added ordinances above and beyond the Law of Moses?

A: Yes, the Temple tax was new. Now that the Temple was complete, Israelites from the surrounding areas came to Jerusalem for the feasts, and their growing numbers required more provisions.

Thus the people were reaffirming the commitment Ezra had initiated years earlier in much less detail. At that time, the returned exiles came back like pioneers to a land that had lain desolate for 70 years. By the time of Nehemiah, the nation was more stabilized, and the people needed more and more information as to their responsibilities under the Law.

Neh. 10:34 And we cast the lots among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for the wood offering, to bring it into the house of our God, after the houses of our fathers, at times appointed year by year, to burn upon the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the law:

Normally we would not think of a wood offering, but the Law stated that once the fire was built upon the altar, it had to be kept burning continually, day and night. Hence a considerable amount of wood was consumed. Probably most of the wood was brought in by the Nethinims to assure an adequate supply at all times.

Neh. 10:35 And to bring the firstfruits of our ground, and the firstfruits of all fruit of all trees, year by year, unto the house of the LORD:

The law regarding the firstfruits is another indication that the Israelites were returning to the Mosaic Law.

Neh. 10:36 Also the firstborn of our sons, and of our cattle, as it is written in the law, and the firstlings of our herds and of our flocks, to bring to the house of our God, unto the priests that minister in the house of our God:

Neh. 10:37 And that we should bring the firstfruits of our dough, and our offerings, and the fruit of all manner of trees, of wine and of oil, unto the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God; and the tithes of our ground unto the Levites, that the same Levites might have the tithes in all the cities of our tillage.

The tithes were reinstated, but how were the firstborn of their sons given to the Lord? They were redeemed for money. The other choice was the Nazarite vow. If a son was dedicated to the Lord, a Nazarite vow of full commitment could be taken in the way that Hannah dedicated Samuel; that is, as Samuel grew up, he was put into the service of the Lord. Because most people could not dedicate their sons in this way, the next best method was to pay a price in recognition of their firstborn. It was a fixed price according to age, for during this transition

period, many Israelites did not know about the redemption price of their firstborn sons until the sons were older. In this transition period of 82 years or so, the Israelites were trying to bring back the economy, land, Temple, services, etc., to what was originally intended. Thus the redeeming of the firstborn was in proportion to age.

Neh. 10:38 And the priest the son of Aaron shall be with the Levites, when the Levites take tithes: and the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes unto the house of our God, to the chambers, into the treasure house.

Neh. 10:39 For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering of the corn, of the new wine, and the oil, unto the chambers, where are the vessels of the sanctuary, and the priests that minister, and the porters, and the singers: and we will not forsake the house of our God.

The individual who wrote down these words expressed the attitudes and feelings of the general public and, more particularly now, the responsibilities of the Levites. It is interesting that whenever money and tithes were being collected, the high priest was to be present as the responsible overseer. We recall how Eli failed to stop his sons from their shenanigans when they siphoned off the “cream of the crop” to themselves as individuals. As high priest, Eli received condemnation for this failure of responsibility. The high priest was to make sure that the tithes (both money and goods) were properly handled and given to the Temple service.

Q: What quantity was considered a proper offering of firstfruits?

A: The quantity was not specified. Usually whatever matured first was given as an offering. For instance, normally there is not one apple, then a second apple, etc., but perhaps half a dozen apples ripened together. A person had to use his own judgment. Each person should have reasoned, “The Lord knows what I am doing. If I am stingy and try to cut corners, He will be aware of it.” Therefore, the giving of the firstfruits was a matter of conscience.

Neh. 11:1 And the rulers of the people dwelt at Jerusalem: the rest of the people also cast lots, to bring one of ten to dwell in Jerusalem the holy city, and nine parts to dwell in other cities.

Neh. 11:2 And the people blessed all the men, that willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem.

There was a reason for casting lots to see which of the people would live at Jerusalem. The city was a fledgling without many natural residents at this time in history, and more men were needed for security purposes. A sufficient population kept the city from being captured by an enemy surprise attack. Of course those who lived there participated in making planned improvements to the city itself.

The men “willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem.” This was a freewill offering, as well as a draft to get a numerical one-out-of-ten ratio.

Q: Were these single men?

A: Yes, probably, generally speaking.

Neh. 11:3 Now these are the chief of the province that dwelt in Jerusalem: but in the cities of Judah dwelt every one in his possession in their cities, to wit, Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the Nethinims, and the children of Solomon’s servants.

Neh. 11:4 And at Jerusalem dwelt certain of the children of Judah, and of the children of Benjamin. Of the children of Judah; Athaiah the son of Uzziah, the son of Zechariah, the son of Amariah, the son of Shephatiah, the son of Mahalaleel, of the children of Perez;

Neh. 11:5 And Maaseiah the son of Baruch, the son of Col-hozeh, the son of Hazaiah, the son of Adaiah, the son of Joiarib, the son of Zechariah, the son of Shiloni.

Neh. 11:6 All the sons of Perez that dwelt at Jerusalem were four hundred threescore and eight valiant men.

Neh. 11:7 And these are the sons of Benjamin; Sallu the son of Meshullam, the son of Joed, the son of Pedaiah, the son of Kolaiah, the son of Maaseiah, the son of Ithiel, the son of Jesaiah.

Neh. 11:8 And after him Gabbai, Sallai, nine hundred twenty and eight.

Neh. 11:9 And Joel the son of Zichri was their overseer: and Judah the son of Senuah was second over the city.

Neh. 11:10 Of the priests: Jedaiah the son of Joiarib, Jachin.

Neh. 11:11 Seraiah the son of Hilkiyah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Zadok, the son of Meraioth, the son of Ahitub, was the ruler of the house of God.

Neh. 11:12 And their brethren that did the work of the house were eight hundred twenty and two: and Adaiah the son of Jeroham, the son of Pelaliah, the son of Amzi, the son of Zechariah, the son of Pashur, the son of Malchiah,

Neh. 11:13 And his brethren, chief of the fathers, two hundred forty and two: and Amashai the son of Azareel, the son of Ahasai, the son of Meshillemoth, the son of Immer.

Neh. 11:14 And their brethren, mighty men of valour, an hundred twenty and eight: and their overseer was Zabdiel, the son of one of the great men.

Neh. 11:15 Also of the Levites: Shemaiah the son of Hashub, the son of Azrikam, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Bunni;

Neh. 11:16 And Shabbethai and Jozabad, of the chief of the Levites, had the oversight of the outward business of the house of God.

Neh. 11:17 And Mattaniah the son of Micha, the son of Zabdi, the son of Asaph, was the principal to begin the thanksgiving in prayer: and Bakbukiah the second among his brethren, and Abda the son of Shammua, the son of Galal, the son of Jeduthun.

Neh. 11:18 All the Levites in the holy city were two hundred fourscore and four.

Neh. 11:19 Moreover the porters, Akkub, Talmon, and their brethren that kept the gates, were an hundred seventy and two.

Neh. 11:20 And the residue of Israel, of the priests, and the Levites, were in all the cities of Judah, every one in his inheritance.

Neh. 11:21 But the Nethinims dwelt in Ophel: and Ziha and Gispa were over the Nethinims.

Neh. 11:22 The overseer also of the Levites at Jerusalem was Uzzi the son of Bani, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Micha. Of the sons of Asaph, the singers were over the business of the house of God.

Neh. 11:23 For it was the king's commandment concerning them, that a certain portion should be for the singers, due for every day.

Neh. 11:24 And Pethahiah the son of Meshezabeel, of the children of Zerah the son of Judah, was at the king's hand in all matters concerning the people.

Neh. 11:25 And for the villages, with their fields, some of the children of Judah dwelt at Kirjath-arba, and in the villages thereof, and at Dibon, and in the villages thereof, and at Jekabzeel, and in the villages thereof,

Neh. 11:26 And at Jeshua, and at Moladah, and at Beth-phelet,

Neh. 11:27 And at Hazar-shual, and at Beer-sheba, and in the villages thereof,

Neh. 11:28 And at Ziklag, and at Mekonah, and in the villages thereof,

Neh. 11:29 And at En-rimmon, and at Zareah, and at Jarmuth,

Neh. 11:30 Zanoah, Adullam, and in their villages, at Lachish, and the fields thereof, at Azekah, and in the villages thereof. And they dwelt from Beer-sheba unto the valley of Hinnom.

Neh. 11:31 The children also of Benjamin from Geba dwelt at Michmash, and Aija, and Beth-el, and in their villages,

Neh. 11:32 And at Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah,

Neh. 11:33 Hazor, Ramah, Gittaim,

Neh. 11:34 Hadid, Zeboim, Neballat,

Neh. 11:35 Lod, and Ono, the valley of craftsmen.

Neh. 11:36 And of the Levites were divisions in Judah, and in Benjamin.

Neh. 12:1 Now these are the priests and the Levites that went up with Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua: Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra,

Neh. 12:2 Amariah, Malluch, Hattush,

Neh. 12:3 Shechaniah, Rehum, Meremoth,

Neh. 12:4 Iddo, Ginnetho, Abijah,

Neh. 12:5 Miamin, Maadiah, Bilgah,

Neh. 12:6 Shemaiah, and Joiarib, Jedaiah,

Neh. 12:7 Sallu, Amok, Hilkiyah, Jedaiah. These were the chief of the priests and of their brethren in the days of Jeshua.

Neh. 12:8 Moreover the Levites: Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and Mattaniah, which was over the thanksgiving, he and his brethren.

Neh. 12:9 Also Bakbukiah and Unni, their brethren, were over against them in the watches.

Neh. 12:10 And Jeshua begat Joiakim, Joiakim also begat Eliashib, and Eliashib begat Joiada,

Neh. 12:11 And Joiada begat Jonathan, and Jonathan begat Jaddua.

Neh. 12:12 And in the days of Joiakim were priests, the chief of the fathers: of Seraiah, Meraiah; of Jeremiah, Hananiah;

Neh. 12:13 Of Ezra, Meshullam; of Amariah, Jehohanan;

Neh. 12:14 Of Melicu, Jonathan; of Shebaniah, Joseph;

Neh. 12:15 Of Harim, Adna; of Meraioth, Helkai;

Neh. 12:16 Of Iddo, Zechariah; of Ginnethon, Meshullam;

Neh. 12:17 Of Abijah, Zichri; of Miniamin, of Moadiah, Piltai;

Neh. 12:18 Of Bilgah, Shammua; of Shemaiah, Jehonathan;

Neh. 12:19 And of Joiarib, Mattenai; of Jedaiah, Uzzi;

Neh. 12:20 Of Sallai, Kallai; of Amok, Eber;

Neh. 12:21 Of Hilkiyah, Hashabiah; of Jedaiah, Nethaneel.

Neh. 12:22 The Levites in the days of Eliashib, Joiada, and Johanan, and Jaddua, were recorded chief of the fathers: also the priests, to the reign of Darius the Persian.

Neh. 12:23 The sons of Levi, the chief of the fathers, were written in the book of the chronicles, even until the days of Johanan the son of Eliashib.

Neh. 12:24 And the chief of the Levites: Hashabiah, Sherebiah, and Jeshua the son of Kadmiel, with their brethren over against them, to praise and to give thanks, according to the commandment of David the man of God, ward over against ward.

Neh. 12:25 Mattaniah, and Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon, Akkub, were porters keeping the ward at the thresholds of the gates.

Neh. 12:26 These were in the days of Joiakim the son of Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, and in the days of Nehemiah the governor, and of Ezra the priest, the scribe.

Neh. 12:27 And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought the Levites out of all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem, to keep the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings, and with singing, with cymbals, psalteries, and with harps.

Many of the Jews from outside Jerusalem were from Judah and Benjamin. The exception would have been the Levites, who were gathered from various areas to assemble for this dedication of the wall of Jerusalem.

Neh. 12:28 And the sons of the singers gathered themselves together, both out of the plain country round about Jerusalem, and from the villages of Netophathi;

Neh. 12:29 Also from the house of Gilgal, and out of the fields of Geba and Azmaveth: for the singers had builded them villages round about Jerusalem.

Neh. 12:30 And the priests and the Levites purified themselves, and purified the people, and the gates, and the wall.

Neh. 12:31 Then I brought up the princes of Judah upon the wall, and appointed two great companies of them that gave thanks, whereof one went on the right hand upon the wall toward the dung gate:

Neh. 12:32 And after them went Hoshaiah, and half of the princes of Judah,

Neh. 12:33 And Azariah, Ezra, and Meshullam,

Neh. 12:34 Judah, and Benjamin, and Shemaiah, and Jeremiah,

Neh. 12:35 And certain of the priests' sons with trumpets; namely, Zechariah the son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Michaiah, the son of Zaccur, the son of Asaph:

Neh. 12:36 And his brethren, Shemaiah, and Azarael, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethaneel, and Judah, Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God, and Ezra the scribe before them.

Neh. 12:37 And at the fountain gate, which was over against them, they went up by the stairs of the city of David, at the going up of the wall, above the house of David, even unto the water gate eastward.

Neh. 12:38 And the other company of them that gave thanks went over against them, and I after them, and the half of the people upon the wall, from beyond the tower of the furnaces even unto the broad wall;

Neh. 12:39 And from above the gate of Ephraim, and above the old gate, and above the fish gate, and the tower of Hananeel, and the tower of Meah, even unto the sheep gate: and they stood still in the prison gate.

Neh. 12:40 So stood the two companies of them that gave thanks in the house of God, and I, and the half of the rulers with me:

Neh. 12:41 And the priests; Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Michaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah, with trumpets;

Neh. 12:42 And Maaseiah, and Shemaiah, and Eleazar, and Uzzi, and Jehohanan, and Malchijah, and Elam, and Ezer. And the singers sang loud, with Jezrahiah their overseer.

Neh. 12:43 Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced: for God had made them rejoice with great joy: the wives also and the children rejoiced: so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off.

Comment: Verse 43 is beautiful. The Israelites offered “*great sacrifices, and rejoiced: for God had made them rejoice with great joy ... so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off.*”

Neh. 12:44 And at that time were some appointed over the chambers for the treasures, for the offerings, for the firstfruits, and for the tithes, to gather into them out of the fields of the cities the portions of the law for the priests and Levites: for Judah rejoiced for the priests and for the Levites that waited.

Neh. 12:45 And both the singers and the porters kept the ward of their God, and the ward of the purification, according to the commandment of David, and of Solomon his son.

Neh. 12:46 For in the days of David and Asaph of old there were chief of the singers, and songs of praise and thanksgiving unto God.

Neh. 12:47 And all Israel in the days of Zerubbabel, and in the days of Nehemiah, gave the portions of the singers and the porters, every day his portion: and they sanctified holy things unto the Levites; and the Levites sanctified them unto the children of Aaron.

The individuals involved in this songfest are named. The dividing line for the two companies was the Dung Gate (Neh. 12:31). The singing was spectacular, for the people were below and those standing on the wall singing were quite high up, as on a stage. The Hill of Ophal on the south part of the city sloped downward toward the Kidron. Therefore, when the choir sang on this vantage point, they were heard at quite a distance, even by people in the surrounding area.

Nehemiah states that he went with the second company on the nether side of the Dung Gate (Neh. 12:38-40). Therefore, he was up on the wall with the other leading personalities. Incidentally, in the above listing, the name Shallieu appears as “Sallu” (Neh. 11:7).

Neh. 13:1 On that day they read in the book of Moses in the audience of the people; and therein was found written, that the Ammonite and the Moabite should not come into the congregation of God for ever;

Neh. 13:2 Because they met not the children of Israel with bread and with water, but hired Balaam against them, that he should curse them: howbeit our God turned the curse into a blessing.

What is the significance of the Ammonites and the Moabites not being allowed to commingle in the Temple worship? Had they been kind to Israel at the time of the Exodus, they might have been permitted to come into the congregation like, for example, the Nethinims and others who could not prove their names in the registry. Hiring Balaam to curse the Israelites was a serious offense. Also, the Ammonites and the Moabites made the Israelites go around the long way, which was down in the heat of the valley, instead of the more direct and higher route north.

The prohibition against the Ammonites and the Moabites is in Deuteronomy 23:3,4, “An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD for ever: Because they met you not with bread and with water in the way, when ye came forth out of Egypt; and because they hired against thee Balaam the son of Beor of Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse thee.” The reason this prohibition was pertinent to the experience of the regathered Israelites is that these

two nations were very close to Jerusalem (they were to the east on the other side of the Jordan River). Therefore, special care had to be taken to prevent the Ammonites and the Moabites from entering the worship of the Israelites.

Neh. 13:3 Now it came to pass, when they had heard the law, that they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude.

When the Israelites heard the Law, they separated from themselves the “mixed multitude,” that is, the children who were the byproduct of former mixed marriages.

Neh. 13:4 And before this, Eliashib the priest, having the oversight of the chamber of the house of our God, was allied unto Tobiah:

Eliashib, the Israelite priest, was allied with Tobiah, an Ammonite and one of the enemies of Israel. As priest, Eliashib was very responsible for having entered such an improper alliance.

Neh. 13:5 And he had prepared for him a great chamber, where aforetime they laid the meat offerings, the frankincense, and the vessels, and the tithes of the corn, the new wine, and the oil, which was commanded to be given to the Levites, and the singers, and the porters; and the offerings of the priests.

Neh. 13:6 But in all this time was not I at Jerusalem: for in the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon came I unto the king, and after certain days obtained I leave of the king:

Eliashib’s alliance with Tobiah took place in Nehemiah’s absence. In the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes, Nehemiah returned to Persia. (He had left Persia in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, 12 years earlier.) After a little while, Nehemiah requested of the king a second leave of absence, which was granted.

Neh. 13:7 And I came to Jerusalem, and understood of the evil that Eliashib did for Tobiah, in preparing him a chamber in the courts of the house of God.

Neh. 13:8 And it grieved me sore: therefore I cast forth all the household stuff of Tobiah out of the chamber.

In righteous indignation, Nehemiah cast out the “household stuff of Tobiah” from the chamber in the courts of the Temple. This incident reminds us of Jesus’ overturning the tables of the money changers.

The word “courts” (plural) indicates that the large chamber given to Tobiah as a residence in the Temple itself was like a buffer room between the inner and the outer courts of the Temple. Previously the chamber was used for sanctified items.

Neh. 13:9 Then I commanded, and they cleansed the chambers: and thither brought I again the vessels of the house of God, with the meat offering and the frankincense.

Neh. 13:10 And I perceived that the portions of the Levites had not been given them: for the Levites and the singers, that did the work, were fled every one to his field.

Not only did Nehemiah restore the incense, vessels, wine, oil, etc., to the chamber, but he cleansed the chamber as well. The implication is that some type of sacrifice or ceremony was performed to cleanse the room from contamination.

Apparently, Tobiah had aspirations of eventually taking over the priesthood. Realizing this during his first visit, Nehemiah had turned a deaf ear to all of Tobiah's suggestions. But when Nehemiah returned to Persia, Tobiah made inroads with Eliashib, who was a weaker character. Moreover, either Eliashib himself or some of his followers or servants must have taken for themselves portions of the tithes given by the people for the support of the Levites. As a result, the Levites fled to their own fields to grow crops for food.

Neh. 13:11 Then contended I with the rulers, and said, Why is the house of God forsaken? And I gathered them together, and set them in their place.

Normally a relatively mild-tempered person, Nehemiah "set them [the rulers] in their place." There is a lot of significance behind that statement. Nehemiah's actions are a reminder of Moses in his anger. Probably Eliashib was one of the "rulers" put in their place, that is, rulers both ecclesiastical and civil.

Neh. 13:12 Then brought all Judah the tithe of the corn and the new wine and the oil unto the treasuries.

Neh. 13:13 And I made treasurers over the treasuries, Shelemiah the priest, and Zadok the scribe, and of the Levites, Pedaiah: and next to them was Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah: for they were counted faithful, and their office was to distribute unto their brethren.

Nehemiah not only put the errant rulers in their place but substituted and replaced them with faithful individuals.

Neh. 13:14 Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for the offices thereof.

Neh. 13:15 In those days saw I in Judah some treading wine presses on the sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the sabbath day: and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold victuals.

Earlier Nehemiah had instructed the Israelites to properly observe the sabbath and not to engage in commerce. In his absence, however, the people were slack even along these lines.

Neh. 13:16 There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the sabbath unto the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem.

Also, outside traders brought wares into Jerusalem to sell on the sabbath.

Neh. 13:17 Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the sabbath day?

Nehemiah contended with the nobles of Judah because they permitted the profaning of the sabbath. Their slackness extended beyond Jerusalem to Judah.

Neh. 13:18 Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the sabbath.

Neh. 13:19 And it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the

sabbath, I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the sabbath: and some of my servants set I at the gates, that there should no burden be brought in on the sabbath day.

Nehemiah commanded that the gates of Jerusalem be shut for the sabbath. Also, because he did not fully trust the people and feared they would be slack in stopping the commerce and trade, he stationed some of his servants at the gates to make sure wares would not be brought into the city for sale on the sabbath.

This incident helps us to see how far the nation of Israel is from the Law today. The ultra Orthodox are trying to reinstitute the Law in certain sections of Jerusalem where they outnumber the more liberal Jews, and their contention for prohibiting commerce on the sabbath is proper. However, conditions have changed so radically in Israel along all lines that it would be impossible to enforce the Law now. For more than a century in the Period of the Judges, everyone did what was right in his own eyes; that is, each person did what he or she pleased. "In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6). That attitude is generally the condition of society today.

Neh. 13:20 So the merchants and sellers of all kind of ware lodged without Jerusalem once or twice.

The merchants were outside the city gates just waiting for the opportune moment to enter Jerusalem and resume the sale of their goods. If Nehemiah returned to Persia, they would again be profaning the sabbath.

Neh. 13:21 Then I testified against them, and said unto them, Why lodge ye about the wall? if ye do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time forth came they no more on the sabbath.

Of necessity Nehemiah got still sterner.

Neh. 13:22 And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should come and keep the gates, to sanctify the sabbath day. Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy.

Neh. 13:23 In those days also saw I Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab:

Chapter 13 started with the prohibition about the Ammonites and the Moabites and the strict commandment in the Law about them. Ammon and Moab were to the east across the Jordan. The reference to Ashdod, a Philistine city on the Mediterranean coast on the southwest border of Israel, shows that the Philistine element was encroaching on Israel.

Comment: This is the third mention of the Israelites' taking foreign wives and the third reprimand.

Reply: Ezra returned to Israel in the seventh year of Artaxerxes. Nehemiah returned in the twentieth year and sometime subsequent to the thirty-second year. Thus three times within a relatively short period of time, the Israelites were severely warned about foreign wives by either Ezra or Nehemiah.

Q: What about Ruth the Moabitess?

A: Ruth was a proselyte, and proselytes were permitted. The point was that one should not serve both God and a heathen god or gods. Ruth severed her ties with Moab.

Neh. 13:24 And their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people.

Neh. 13:25 And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves.

Like Moses, Nehemiah had a temper when it came to righteous indignation. He took Jews by the hair who had gone astray by mixing with forbidden Gentiles. By now Nehemiah was not a young man—he was probably in his late sixties—and neither was Moses.

Neh. 13:26 Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin.

Nehemiah was saying that if Solomon, who had God's approval early in his reign, could deflect, then who did the people think they were? Nehemiah used a form of strong cynicism against his own people. What a sad commentary it is that among the Israelites resident in the homeland, a leader did not arise to awaken the people to their plight!

Neh. 13:27 Shall we then hearken unto you to do all this great evil, to transgress against our God in marrying strange wives?

Neh. 13:28 And one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was son-in-law to Sanballat the Horonite: therefore I chased him from me.

Nehemiah was not a priest, but in the absence of a high priest with principles, he felt justified in his criticism. Therefore, he chased out the son-in-law. Not only was intermarriage occurring, but it was occurring up to the highest level.

Here we see a side of Nehemiah that was not evident earlier when he was a diplomat. Having the stature and the prestige of being cupbearer to the king of Persia, he had shown deference and consideration in trying to reason with the people. However, this method was not successful, and now he spoke and acted more forcefully. In contrast, Ezra was fiery throughout his ministry.

Neh. 13:29 Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and of the Levites.

Neh. 13:30 Thus cleansed I them from all strangers, and appointed the wards of the priests and the Levites, every one in his business;

Neh. 13:31 And for the wood offering, at times appointed, and for the firstfruits. Remember me, O my God, for good.

Several times in this chapter, Nehemiah more or less said, "Remember me, O my God, with your mercy." The Israelites were defiling themselves, and Nehemiah wanted to rid the nation of the filth. Realizing he was enmeshed in the quagmire condition himself, he was saying to God, "I am trying to do my best, but I am not successful."

The account does not state whether Nehemiah died in Israel or returned to the king of Persia and died there. However, the wording here sounds as if he may have deceased in Israel at this time. We also do not know when Ezra died.

The historical books of the Bible stop with Nehemiah.