

# THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

Commentary by **ROBERT JAMIESON**

## CHAPTER 1

### NEHEMIAH 1:1-3.

#### NEHEMIAH, UNDERSTANDING BY HANANI THE AFFLICTED STATE OF JERUSALEM, MOURNS, FASTS, AND PRAYS.

1. *Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah* — This eminently pious and patriotic Jew is to be carefully distinguished from two other persons of the same name — one of whom is mentioned as helping to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (<sup><K189></sup>Nehemiah 3:16), and the other is noticed in the list of those who accompanied Zerubbabel in the first detachment of returning exiles (<sup><K190></sup>Ezra 2:2 <sup><K191></sup>Nehemiah 7:7). Though little is known of his genealogy, it is highly probable that he was a descendant of the tribe of Judah and the royal family of David.

*in the month Chisleu* — answering to the close of November and the larger part of December.

*Shushan the palace* — the capital of ancient Susiana, east of the Tigris, a province of Persia. From the time of Cyrus it was the favorite winter residence of the Persian kings.

2, 3. *Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah* — Hanani is called his brother (<sup><K192></sup>Nehemiah 7:2). But as that term was used loosely by Jews as well as other Orientals, it is probable that no more is meant than that he was of the same family. According to JOSEPHUS,

Nehemiah, while walking around the palace walls, overheard some persons conversing in the Hebrew language. Having ascertained that they had lately returned from Judea, he was informed by them, in answer to his eager enquiries, of the unfinished and desolate condition of Jerusalem, as well as the defenseless state of the returned exiles. The commissions previously given to Zerubbabel and Ezra extending only to the repair of the temple and private dwellings, the walls and gates of the city had been allowed to remain a mass of shattered ruins, as they had been laid by the Chaldean siege.

## NEHEMIAH 1:4-11.

### HIS PRAYER.

**4. *when I heard these words, that I sat down ... and mourned ... and fasted, and prayed*** — The recital deeply affected the patriotic feelings of this good man, and no comfort could he find but in earnest and protracted prayer, that God would favor the purpose, which he seems to have secretly formed, of asking the royal permission to go to Jerusalem.

**11. *I was the king's cupbearer*** — This officer, in the ancient Oriental courts, was always a person of rank and importance; and, from the confidential nature of his duties and his frequent access to the royal presence, he possessed great influence.

## CHAPTER 2

### NEHEMIAH 2:1-20.

#### ARTAXERXES, UNDERSTANDING THE CAUSE OF NEHEMIAH'S SADNESS, SENDS HIM WITH LETTERS AND A COMMISSION TO BUILD AGAIN THE WALLS OF JERUSALEM.

1. *it came to pass in the month Nisan* — This was nearly four months after he had learned the desolate and ruinous state of Jerusalem (<sup><4000</sup>Nehemiah 1:1). The reasons for so long a delay cannot be ascertained.

*I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king* — XENOPHON has particularly remarked about the polished and graceful manner in which the cupbearers of the Median, and consequently the Persian, monarchs performed their duty of presenting the wine to their royal master. Having washed the cup in the king's presence and poured into their left hand a little of the wine, which they drank in his presence, they then handed the cup to him, not grasped, but lightly held with the tips of their thumb and fingers. This description has received some curious illustrations from the monuments of Assyria and Persia, on which the cupbearers are frequently represented in the act of handing wine to the king.

2-5. *the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad?* — It was deemed highly unbecoming to appear in the royal presence with any weeds or signs of sorrow (<sup><4000</sup>Esther 4:2); and hence it was no wonder that the king was struck with the dejected air of his cupbearer, while that attendant, on his part, felt his agitation increased by his deep anxiety about the issue of the conversation so abruptly begun. But the piety and intense earnestness of the man immediately restored [Nehemiah] to calm self-possession and enabled him to communicate, first, the cause of his sadness (<sup><4000</sup>Nehemiah 2:3), and next, the patriotic wish of his heart to be the honored instrument of reviving the ancient glory of the city of his fathers.

**6-9. *the queen also sitting by him*** — As the Persian monarchs did not admit their wives to be present at their state festivals, this must have been a private occasion. The queen referred to was probably Esther, whose presence would tend greatly to embolden Nehemiah in stating his request; and through her influence, powerfully exerted it may be supposed, also by her sympathy with the patriotic design, his petition was granted, to go as deputy governor of Judea, accompanied by a military guard, and invested with full powers to obtain materials for the building in Jerusalem, as well as to get all requisite aid in promoting his enterprise.

***I set him a time*** — Considering the great despatch made in raising the walls, it is probable that this leave of absence was limited at first to a year or six months, after which he returned to his duties in Shushan. The circumstance of fixing a set time for his return, as well as entrusting so important a work as the reformation of Jerusalem to his care, proves the high favor and confidence Nehemiah enjoyed at the Persian court, and the great estimation in which his services were held. At a later period he received a new commission for the better settlement of the affairs of Judea and remained governor of that province for twelve years (<sup><1654></sup>Nehemiah 5:14).

**7. *letters be given me to the governors beyond the river*** — The Persian empire at this time was of vast extent, reaching from the Indus to the Mediterranean. The Euphrates was considered as naturally dividing it into two parts, eastern and western (see on <sup><1578></sup>Ezra 5:3).

**8. *according to the good hand of my God upon me*** — The piety of Nehemiah appears in every circumstance. The conception of his patriotic design, the favorable disposition of the king, and the success of the undertaking are all ascribed to God.

**10. *Sanballat the Horonite*** — Horonaim being a town in Moab, this person, it is probable, was a Moabite.

***Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite*** — The term used indicates him to have been a freed slave, elevated to some official dignity. These were district magistrates under the government of the satrap of Syria; and they seem to have been leaders of the Samaritan faction.

**11, 12. *So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days*** — Deeply affected with the desolations of Jerusalem, and uncertain what course to follow, he remained three days before informing any one of the object of his mission [<sup><4127</sup>Nehemiah 2:17,18]. At the end of the third day, accompanied with a few attendants, he made, under covert of night, a secret survey of the walls and gates [<sup><4125</sup>Nehemiah 2:13-15].

**13-15. *I went out by night by the gate of the valley*** — that is, the Jaffa gate, near the tower of Hippicus.

*even before the dragon well* — that is, fountain on the opposite side of the valley.

*and to the dung port* — the gate on the east of the city, through which there ran a common sewer to the brook Kedron and the valley of Hinnom.

**14. *Then*** — that is, after having passed through the gate of the Essenes.

*I went on to the gate of the fountain* — that is, Siloah, from which turning round the fount of Ophel.

*to the king's pool: but there was no place for the beast that was under me to pass* — that is, by the sides of this pool (Solomon's) there being water in the pool, and too much rubbish about it to permit the passage of the beast.

**15. *Then went I up ... by the brook*** — that is, Kedron.

*and entered by the gate of the valley, and so returned* — the gate leading to the valley of Jehoshaphat, east of the city. He went out by this gate, and having made the circuit of the city, went in by it again [BARCLAY, *City of the Great King*].

**16-18. *the rulers knew not*** — The following day, having assembled the elders, Nehemiah produced his commission and exhorted them to assist in the work. The sight of his credentials, and the animating strain of his address and example, so revived their drooping spirits that they resolved immediately to commence the building, which they did, despite the bitter taunts and scoffing ridicule of some influential men.

# CHAPTER 3

## NEHEMIAH 3:1-32.

### THE NAMES AND ORDER OF THEM THAT BUILDED THE WALL OF JERUSALEM.

1. *Then Eliashib the high priest* — the grandson of Jeshua, and the first high priest after the return from Babylon.

*rose up with his brethren the priests* — that is, set an example by commencing the work, their labors being confined to the sacred localities.

*and they builded the sheep gate* — close to the temple. Its name arose either from the sheep market, or from the pool of Bethesda, which was there ( <BR>John 5:2). There the sheep were washed and then taken to the temple for sacrifice.

*they sanctified it, and set up the doors* — Being the common entrance into the temple, and the first part of the building repaired, it is probable that some religious ceremonies were observed in gratitude for its completion. “It was the first-fruits, and therefore, in the sanctification of it, the whole lump and building was sanctified” [POOLE].

*the tower of Meah* — This word is improperly considered, in our version, as the name of a tower; it is the *Hebrew* word for “a hundred,” so that the meaning is: they not only rebuilt the sheep gate, but also a hundred cubits of the wall, which extended as far as the tower of Hananeel.

2. *next unto him builded the men of Jericho*, etc. — The wall was divided into portions, one of which was assigned respectively to each of the great families which had returned from the captivity. This distribution, by which the building was carried on in all parts simultaneously with great energy, was eminently favorable to despatch. “The villages where the restorers resided being mostly mentioned, it will be seen that this circumstance affords a general indication of the part of the wall upon

which they labored, such places being on that side of the city nearest their place of abode; the only apparent exception being, perhaps, where they repaired more than their piece. Having completed their first undertaking (if they worked any more), there being no more work to be done on the side next their residence, or having arrived after the repairs on that part of the city nearest them under operation were completed, they would go wherever their services would be required” [BARCLAY, *City of the Great King*].

**8. *they fortified Jerusalem unto the broad wall*** — or, “double wall,” extending from the gate of Ephraim to the corner gate, four hundred cubits in length, formerly broken down by Joash, king of Israel [<sup>423</sup>2 Chronicles 25:23], but afterwards rebuilt by Uzziah [<sup>424</sup>2 Chronicles 26:9], who made it so strong that the Chaldeans, finding it difficult to demolish, had left it standing.

**12. *Shallum ... he and his daughters*** — who were either heiresses or rich widows. They undertook to defray the expenses of a part of the wall next them.

**13. *the inhabitants of Zanoah*** — There were two towns so called in the territory of Judah (<sup>425</sup>Joshua 15:34,56).

**14. *Beth-haccerem*** — a city of Judah, supposed to be now occupied by Bethulia, on a hill of the same name, which is sometimes called also the mountain of the Franks, between Jerusalem and Tekoa.

**16. *the sepulchres of David, and to the pool that was made, and unto the house of the mighty*** — that is, along the precipitous cliffs of Zion [BARCLAY].

**19. *at the turning of the wall*** — that is, the wall across the Tyropoeon, being a continuation of the first wall, connecting Mount Zion with the temple wall [BARCLAY].

**25. *the tower which lieth out from the king’s high house*** — that is, watchtower by the royal palace [BARCLAY].

**26. *the Nethinims*** — Not only the priests and the Levites, but the common persons that belonged to the house of God, contributed to the

work. The names of those who repaired the walls of Jerusalem are commemorated because it was a work of piety and patriotism to repair the holy city. It was an instance of religion and courage to defend the true worshippers of God, that they might serve Him in quietness and safety, and, in the midst of so many enemies, go on with this work, piously confiding in the power of God to support them [BISHOP PATRICK].



# CHAPTER 4

## NEHEMIAH 4:1-6.

### WHILE THE ENEMIES SCOFF, NEHEMIAH PRAYS TO GOD, AND CONTINUES THE WORK.

**1. *when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth*** — The Samaritan faction showed their bitter animosity to the Jews on discovering the systematic design of refortifying Jerusalem. Their opposition was confined at first to scoffs and insults, in heaping which the governors made themselves conspicuous, and circulated all sorts of disparaging reflections that might increase the feelings of hatred and contempt for them in their own party. The weakness of the Jews in respect of wealth and numbers, the absurdity of their purpose apparently to reconstruct the walls and celebrate the feast of dedication in one day, the idea of raising the walls on their old foundations, as well as using the charred and mouldering debris of the ruins as the materials for the restored buildings, and the hope of such a parapet as they could raise being capable of serving as a fortress of defense — these all afforded fertile subjects of hostile ridicule.

**3. *if a fox go up*** — The foxes were mentioned because they were known to infest in great numbers the ruined and desolate places in the mount and city of Zion (<sup>2158</sup>Lamentations 5:18).

**4, 5. *Hear, O our God; for we are despised*** — The imprecations invoked here may seem harsh, cruel, and vindictive; but it must be remembered that Nehemiah and his friends regarded those Samaritan leaders as enemies to the cause of God and His people, and therefore as deserving to be visited with heavy judgments. The prayer, therefore, is to be considered as emanating from hearts in which neither hatred, revenge, nor any inferior passion, but a pious and patriotic zeal for the glory of God and the success of His cause, held the ascendant sway.

**6. *all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof*** — The whole circuit of the wall had been distributed in sections to various companies of the people, and was completed to the half of the intended height.

## NEHEMIAH 4:7-23.

### HE SETS A WATCH.

**7-21. *But ... when Sanballat ... heard that the walls ... were made up, and ... the breaches ... stopped*** — The rapid progress of the fortifications, despite all their predictions to the contrary, goaded the Samaritans to frenzy. So they, dreading danger from the growing greatness of the Jews, formed a conspiracy to surprise them, demolish their works, and disperse or intimidate the builders. The plot being discovered, Nehemiah adopted the most energetic measures for ensuring the common safety, as well as the uninterrupted building of the walls. Hitherto the governor, for the sake of despatch, had set all his attendants and guards on the work — now half of them were withdrawn to be constantly in arms. The workmen labored with a trowel in one hand and a sword in the other; and as, in so large a circuit, they were far removed from each other, Nehemiah (who was night and day on the spot, and, by his pious exhortations and example, animated the minds of his people) kept a trumpeter by his side, so that, on any intelligence of a surprise being brought to him, an alarm might be immediately sounded, and assistance rendered to the most distant detachment of their brethren. By these vigilant precautions, the counsels of the enemy were defeated, and the work was carried on apace. God, when He has important public work to do, never fails to raise up instruments for accomplishing it, and in the person of Nehemiah, who, to great natural acuteness and energy added fervent piety and heroic devotion, He provided a leader, whose high qualities fitted him for the demands of the crisis. Nehemiah's vigilance anticipated every difficulty, his prudent measures defeated every obstruction, and with astonishing rapidity this Jerusalem was made again "a city fortified."

## CHAPTER 5

### NEHEMIAH 5:1-5.

#### THE PEOPLE COMPLAIN OF THEIR DEBT, MORTGAGE, AND BONDAGE.

**1-5.** *there was a great cry of the people ... against their brethren* — Such a crisis in the condition of the Jews in Jerusalem — fatigued with hard labor and harassed by the machinations of restless enemies, the majority of them poor, and the bright visions which hope had painted of pure happiness on their return to the land of their fathers being unrealized — must have been very trying to their faith and patience. But, in addition to these vexatious oppressions, many began to sink under a new and more grievous evil. The poor made loud complaints against the rich for taking advantage of their necessities, and grinding them by usurious exactions. Many of them had, in consequence of these oppressions, been driven to such extremities that they had to mortgage their lands and houses to enable them to pay the taxes to the Persian government, and ultimately even to sell their children for slaves to procure the means of subsistence. The condition of the poorer inhabitants was indeed deplorable; for, besides the deficient harvests caused by the great rains (<sup><1500></sup>Ezra 10:9; also <sup><3000></sup>Haggai 1:6-11), a dearth was now threatened by the enemy keeping such a multitude pent up in the city, and preventing the country people bringing in provisions.

### NEHEMIAH 5:6-19.

#### THE USURERS REBUKED.

**6-12.** *I was very angry when I heard their cry and these words* — When such disorders came to the knowledge of the governor, his honest indignation was roused against the perpetrators of the evil. Having summoned a public assembly, he denounced their conduct in terms of just

severity. He contrasted it with his own in redeeming with his money some of the Jewish exiles who, through debt or otherwise, had lost their personal liberty in Babylon. He urged the rich creditors not only to abandon their illegal and oppressive system of usury, but to restore the fields and vineyards of the poor, so that a remedy might be put to an evil the introduction of which had led to much actual disorder, and the continuance of which would inevitably prove ruinous to the newly restored colony, by violating the fundamental principles of the Hebrew constitution. The remonstrance was effectual. The conscience of the usurious oppressors could not resist the touching and powerful appeal. With mingled emotions of shame, contrition, and fear, they with one voice expressed their readiness to comply with the governor's recommendation. The proceedings were closed by the parties binding themselves by a solemn oath, administered by the priests, that they would redeem their pledge, as well as by the governor invoking, by the solemn and significant gesture of shaking a corner of his garment, a malediction on those who should violate it. The historian has taken care to record that the people did according to this promise.

**14. *Moreover from the time that I was appointed ... I and my brethren have not eaten the bread of the governor*** — We have a remarkable proof both of the opulence and the disinterestedness of Nehemiah. As he declined, on conscientious grounds, to accept the lawful emoluments attached to his government, and yet maintained a style of princely hospitality for twelve years out of his own resources, it is evident that his office of cup-bearer at the court of Shushan must have been very lucrative.

**15. *the former governors ... had taken ... bread and wine, besides forty shekels of silver*** — The income of Eastern governors is paid partly in produce, partly in money. "Bread" means all sorts of provision. The forty shekels of silver per day would amount to a yearly salary of about \$9,000.

**17. *Moreover there were at my table an hundred and fifty of the Jews*** — In the East it has been always customary to calculate the expense of a king's or grandee's establishment, not by the amount of money disbursed, but by the quantity of provisions consumed (see <sup><1002></sup>1 Kings 4:22 <sup><1189></sup>18:19 <sup><2161></sup>Ecclesiastes 5:11).

# CHAPTER 6

## NEHEMIAH 6:1-19.

### SANBALLAT PRACTISES AGAINST NEHEMIAH BY INSIDIOUS ATTEMPTS.

**2-4. *Then Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me*** — The Samaritan leaders, convinced that they could not overcome Nehemiah by open arms, resolved to gain advantage over him by deceit and stratagem. With this in view, under pretext of terminating their differences in an amicable manner, they invited him to a conference. The place of rendezvous was fixed “in *some one* of the villages in the plain of Ono.” “In the villages” is, *Hebrew*, “in Cephirim,” or “Chephirah,” the name of a town in the territory of Benjamin (<sup>4097</sup>Joshua 9:17 <sup>4083</sup>18:26). Nehemiah, however, apprehensive of some intended mischief, prudently declined the invitation. Though it was repeated four times, [Nehemiah’s] uniform answer was that his presence could not be dispensed with from the important work in which he was engaged. This was one, though not the only, reason. The principal ground of his refusal was that his seizure or death at their hands would certainly put a stop to the further progress of the fortifications.

**5-9. *Then sent Sanballat his servant ... the fifth time with an open letter in his hand*** — In Western Asia, letters, after being rolled up like a map, are flattened to the breadth of an inch; and instead of being sealed, they are pasted at the ends. In Eastern Asia, the Persians make up their letters in the form of a roll about six inches long, and a bit of paper is fastened round it with gum, and sealed with an impression of ink, which resembles our printers’ ink, but it is not so thick. Letters were, and are still, sent to persons of distinction in a bag or purse, and even to equals they are enclosed — the tie being made with a colored ribbon. But to inferiors, or persons who are to be treated contemptuously, the letters were sent open — that is, not enclosed in a bag. Nehemiah, accustomed to the punctillious ceremonial of the Persian court, would at once notice the want of the usual formality and know that it was from designed disrespect. The strain of the

letter was equally insolent. It was to this effect: The fortifications with which he was so busy were intended to strengthen his position in the view of a meditated revolt: he had engaged prophets to incite the people to enter into his design and support his claim to be their native king; and, to stop the circulation of such reports, which would soon reach the court, he was earnestly besought to come to the wished-for conference. Nehemiah, strong in the consciousness of his own integrity, and penetrating the purpose of this shallow artifice, replied that there were no rumors of the kind described, that the idea of a revolt and the stimulating addresses of hired demagogues were stories of the writer's own invention, and that he declined now, as formerly, to leave his work.

**10-14. *Afterward I came unto the house of Shemaiah***, etc. — This man was the son of a priest, who was an intimate and confidential friend of Nehemiah. The young man claimed to be endowed with the gift of prophecy. Having been secretly bribed by Sanballat, he, in his pretended capacity of prophet, told Nehemiah that his enemies were that night to make an attempt upon his life. He advised him, at the same time, to consult his safety by concealing himself in the sanctuary, a crypt which, from its sanctity, was strong and secure. But the noble-minded governor determined at all hazards to remain at his post, and not bring discredit on the cause of God and religion by his unworthy cowardice in leaving the temple and city unprotected. This plot, together with a secret collusion between the enemy and the nobles of Judah who were favorably disposed towards the bad Samaritan in consequence of his Jewish connections (<sup><4085></sup>Nehemiah 6:18), the undaunted courage and vigilance of Nehemiah were enabled, with the blessing of God, to defeat, and the erection of the walls thus built in troublous times (<sup><2025></sup>Daniel 9:25) was happily completed (<sup><4085></sup>Nehemiah 6:15) in the brief space of fifty-two days. So rapid execution, even supposing some parts of the old wall standing, cannot be sufficiently accounted for, except by the consideration that the builders labored with the ardor of religious zeal, as men employed in the work of God.

# CHAPTER 7

## NEHEMIAH 7:1-4.

### NEHEMIAH COMMITS THE CHARGE OF JERUSALEM TO HANANI AND HANANIAH.

**2. *I gave my brother Hanani ... charge over Jerusalem*** — If, as is commonly supposed, Nehemiah was now contemplating a return to Shushan according to his promise, it was natural that he should wish to entrust the custody of Jerusalem and the management of its civic affairs to men on whose ability, experience, and fidelity, he could confide. Hanani, a near relative (<sup><del>1000</sup>Nehemiah 1:2), was one, and with him was associated, as colleague, Hananiah, “the ruler of the palace” — that is, the marshal or chamberlain of the viceregal court, which Nehemiah had maintained in Jerusalem. The high religious principle, as well as the patriotic spirit of those two men, recommended them as pre-eminently qualified for being invested with an official trust of such peculiar importance. The piety of Hananiah is especially mentioned as the ground of his eminent fidelity in the discharge of all his duties and, consequently, the reason of the confidence which Nehemiah reposed in him; for he was fully persuaded that Hananiah’s fear of God would preserve him from those temptations to treachery and unfaithfulness which he was likely to encounter on the governor’s departure from Jerusalem.

**3. *Let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun be hot***, etc. — In the East it is customary to open the gates of a city at sunrise, and to bar them at sunset — a rule which is very rarely, and not except to persons of authority, infringed upon. Nehemiah recommended that the gates of Jerusalem should not be opened so early; a precaution necessary at a time when the enemy was practising all sorts of dangerous stratagems, to ensure that the inhabitants were all astir and enjoyed the benefit of clear broad daylight for observing the suspicious movements of any enemy. The propriety of regularly barring the gates at sunset was, in this instance,

accompanied with the appointment of a number of the people to act as sentinels, each mounting guard in front of his own house.

**4. *Now the city was large and great*** — The walls being evidently built on the old foundations, the city covered a large extent of surface, as all Oriental towns do, the houses standing apart with gardens and orchards intervening. This extent, in the then state of Jerusalem, was the more observable as the population was comparatively small, and the habitations of the most rude and simple construction — mere wooden sheds or coverings of loose, unmortared stones.

### NEHEMIAH 7:5-38.

#### GENEALOGY OF THOSE WHO CAME AT THE FIRST OUT OF BABYLON.

**5. *my God put into mine heart to gather together the nobles***, etc. — The arrangement about to be described, though dictated by mere common prudence, is, in accordance with the pious feelings of Nehemiah, ascribed not to his own prudence or reflection, but to the grace of God prompting and directing him. He resolved to prepare a register of the returned exiles, containing an exact record of the family and ancestral abode of every individual. While thus directing his attention, he discovered a register of the first detachment who had come under the care of Zerubbabel. It is transcribed in the following verses, and differs in some few particulars from that given in <sup><4106></sup>Ezra 2:1-61. But the discrepancy is sufficiently accounted for from the different circumstances in which the two registers were taken; that of Ezra having been made up at Babylon, while that of Nehemiah was drawn out in Judea, after the walls of Jerusalem had been rebuilt. The lapse of so many years might well be expected to make a difference appear in the catalogue, through death or other causes; in particular, one person being, according to Jewish custom, called by different names. Thus Hariph (<sup><4072></sup>Nehemiah 7:24) is the same as Jorah (<sup><4108></sup>Ezra 2:18), Sia (<sup><4077></sup>Nehemiah 7:47) the same as Siaha (<sup><4104></sup>Ezra 2:44), etc. Besides other purposes to which this genealogy of the nobles, rulers, and people was subservient, one leading object contemplated by it was to



ascertain with accuracy the parties to whom the duty legally belonged of ministering at the altar and conducting the various services of the temple. For guiding to exact information in this important point of enquiry, the possession of the old register of Zerubbabel was invaluable.

## NEHEMIAH 7:39-73.

### OF THE PRIESTS.

**39. *The priests*** — It appears that only four of the courses of the priests returned from the captivity; and that the course of Abia (<sup><1075></sup>Luke 1:5) is not in the list. But it must be noticed that these four courses were afterwards divided into twenty-four, which retained the names of the original courses which David appointed.

**70. *And some of the chief of the fathers***, etc. — With <sup><1075></sup>Nehemiah 7:69 the register ends, and the thread of Nehemiah's history is resumed. He was the *tirshatha*, or governor, and the liberality displayed by him and some of the leading men for the suitable equipment of the ministers of religion, forms the subject of the remaining portion of the chapter. Their donations consisted principally in garments. This would appear a singular description of gifts to be made by any one among us; but, in the East, a present of garments, or of any article of use, is conformable to the prevailing sentiments and customs of society.

***drams of gold*** — that is, “darics.” A daric was a gold coin of ancient Persia.

**71. *pound of silver*** — that is, *mina* (sixty shekels, or about \$45).

**73. *So ... all Israel, dwelt in their cities*** — The utility of these genealogical registers was thus found in guiding to a knowledge of the cities and localities in each tribe to which every family anciently belonged.

# CHAPTER 8

## NEHEMIAH 8:1-8.

### RELIGIOUS MANNER OF READING AND HEARING THE LAW.

1. *all the people gathered themselves together as one man* — The occasion was the celebration of the feast of the seventh month (<sup><K073</sup>Nehemiah 7:73). The beginning of every month was ushered in as a sacred festival; but this, the commencement of the seventh month, was kept with distinguished honor as “the feast of trumpets,” which extended over two days. It was the first day of the seventh ecclesiastical year, and the new year’s day of the Jewish civil year, on which account it was held as “a great day.” The place where the general concourse of people was held was “at the water gate,” on the south rampart. Through that gate the Nethinims or Gibeonites brought water into the temple, and there was a spacious area in front of it.

*they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses* — He had come to Jerusalem twelve or thirteen years previous to Nehemiah. He either remained there or had returned to Babylon in obedience to the royal order, and for the discharge of important duties. He had returned along with Nehemiah, but in a subordinate capacity. From the time of Nehemiah’s appointment to the dignity of *tirshatha*, Ezra had retired into private life. Although cordially and zealously co-operating with the former patriot in his important measures of reform, the pious priest had devoted his time and attention principally toward producing a complete edition of the canonical Scriptures. The public reading of the Scriptures was required by the law to be made every seventh year; but during the long period of the captivity this excellent practice, with many others, had fallen into neglect, till revived, on this occasion. That there was a strong and general desire among the returned exiles in Jerusalem to hear the word of God read to them indicates a greatly improved tone of religious feeling.

**4. *Ezra ... stood upon a pulpit of wood*** — Not made in the form known to us, but only a raised scaffold or platform, broad enough to allow fourteen persons to stand with ease upon it. Ezra's duty was very laborious, as he continued reading aloud from morning until midday, but his labor was lightened by the aid of the other priests present. Their presence was of importance, partly to show their cordial agreement with Ezra's declaration of divine truth; and partly to take their share with him in the important duty of publicly reading and expounding the Scripture.

**5. *when he opened it, all the people stood up*** — This attitude they assumed either from respect to God's word, or, rather, because the reading was prefaced by a solemn prayer, which was concluded by a general expression of "Amen, Amen."

**7, 8. *caused the people to understand the law ... gave the sense*** — Commentators are divided in opinion as to the import of this statement. Some think that Ezra read the law in pure *Hebrew*, while the Levites, who assisted him, translated it sentence by sentence into Chaldee, the vernacular dialect which the exiles spoke in Babylon. Others maintain that the duty of these Levites consisted in explaining to the people, many of whom had become very ignorant, what Ezra had read.

## NEHEMIAH 8:9-15.

### THE PEOPLE COMFORTED.

**9, 10. *This day is holy unto the Lord ... mourn not, nor weep*** — A deep sense of their national sins, impressively brought to their remembrance by the reading of the law and its denunciations, affected the hearts of the people with penitential sorrow. But notwithstanding the painful remembrances of their national sins which the reading of the law awakened, the people were exhorted to cherish the feelings of joy and thankfulness associated with a sacred festival (see on <sup>(1823)</sup>Leviticus 23:24). By sending portions of it to their poorer brethren (<sup>(1831)</sup>Deuteronomy 16:11,14 <sup>(1839)</sup>Esther 9:19), they would also enable them to participate in the public rejoicings.

## NEHEMIAH 8:16-18.

### THEY KEEP THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES.

**16. *the people went forth, and brought ... and made themselves booths,*** etc. — (See on <sup><4623></sup>Leviticus 23:34; see on <sup><4613></sup>Deuteronomy 16:13).

**17. *since the days of Jeshua ... had not the children of Israel done so*** — This national feast had not been neglected for so protracted a period. Besides that it is impossible that such a flagrant disregard of the law could have been tolerated by Samuel, David, and other pious rulers, its observance is sufficiently indicated (<sup><4182></sup>1 Kings 8:2,65 <sup><4402></sup>2 Chronicles 7:9) and expressly recorded (<sup><4534></sup>Ezra 3:4). But the meaning is, that the popular feelings had never been raised to such a height of enthusiastic joy since the time of their entrance into Canaan, as now on their return after a long and painful captivity.

**18. *Also day by day ... he read in the book of the law of God*** — This was more than was enjoined (<sup><4510></sup>Deuteronomy 31:10-12), and arose from the exuberant zeal of the time.

***on the eighth day was a solemn assembly*** — This was the last and great day of the feast (see on <sup><0225></sup>Numbers 29:35). In later times, other ceremonies which increased the rejoicing were added (<sup><4057></sup>John 7:37).

# CHAPTER 9

## NEHEMIAH 9:1-3.

### A SOLEMN FAST AND REPENTANCE OF THE PEOPLE.

1. *Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month* — that is, on the second day after the close of the feast of tabernacles, which commenced on the fourteenth and terminated on the twenty-second (<sup>4023</sup>Leviticus 23:34-37). The day immediately after that feast, the twenty-third, had been occupied in separating the delinquents from their unlawful wives, as well, perhaps, as in taking steps for keeping aloof in future from unnecessary intercourse with the heathen around them. For although this necessary measure of reformation had been begun formerly by Ezra (<sup>450</sup>Ezra 10:1-17), and satisfactorily accomplished at that time (in so far as he had information of the existing abuses, or possessed the power of correcting them) yet it appears that this reformatory work of Ezra had been only partial and imperfect. Many cases of delinquency had escaped, or new defaulters had appeared who had contracted those forbidden alliances; and there was an urgent necessity for Nehemiah again to take vigorous measures for the removal of a social evil which threatened the most disastrous consequences to the character and prosperity of the chosen people. A solemn fast was now observed for the expression of those penitential and sorrowful feelings which the reading of the law had produced, but which had been suppressed during the celebration of the feast; and the sincerity of their repentance was evinced by the decisive steps taken for the correction of existing abuses in the matter of marriage.

2. *confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers* — Not only did they read in their recent sufferings a punishment of the national apostasy and guilt, but they had made themselves partakers of their fathers' sins by following the same evil ways.

3. *they ... read in the book of the law* — Their extraordinary zeal led them to continue this as before.

*one fourth part of the day* — that is, for three hours, twelve hours being the acknowledged length of the Jewish day (<sup>401</sup>John 11:9). This solemn diet of worship, which probably commenced at the morning sacrifice, was continued for six hours, that is, till the time of the evening sacrifice. The worship which they gave to the Lord their God, at this season of solemn national humiliation, consisted in acknowledging and adoring His great mercy in the forgiveness of their great and multiplied offenses, in delivering them from the merited judgments which they had already experienced or which they had reason to apprehend, in continuing amongst them the light and blessings of His word and worship, and in supplicating the extension of His grace and protection.

### <sup>400</sup>NEHEMIAH 9:4-38.

#### THE LEVITES CONFESS GOD'S MANIFOLD GOODNESS, AND THEIR OWN WICKEDNESS.

4. *Then stood up upon the stairs* — the scaffolds or pulpits, whence the Levites usually addressed the people. There were probably several placed at convenient distances, to prevent confusion and the voice of one drowning those of the others.

*cried with a loud voice unto the Lord* — Such an exertion, of course, was indispensably necessary, in order that the speakers might be heard by the vast multitude congregated in the open air. But these speakers were then engaged in expressing their deep sense of sin, as well as fervently imploring the forgiving mercy of God; and “crying with a loud voice” was a natural accompaniment of this extraordinary prayer meeting, as violent gestures and vehement tones are always the way in which the Jews, and other people in the East, have been accustomed to give utterance to deep and earnest feelings.

5. *Then the Levites ... said, Stand up and bless the Lord your God* — If this prayer was uttered by all these Levites in common, it must have been prepared and adopted beforehand, perhaps, by Ezra; but it may only embody the substance of the confession and thanksgiving.

**6-38. *Thou, even thou, art Lord alone***, etc. — In this solemn and impressive prayer, in which they make public confession of their sins, and deprecate the judgments due to the transgressions of their fathers, they begin with a profound adoration of God, whose supreme majesty and omnipotence is acknowledged in the creation, preservation, and government of all. Then they proceed to enumerate His mercies and distinguished favors to them as a nation, from the period of the call of their great ancestor and the gracious promise intimated to him in the divinely bestowed name of Abraham, a promise which implied that he was to be the Father of the faithful, the ancestor of the Messiah, and the honored individual in whose seed all the families of the earth should be blessed. Tracing in full and minute detail the signal instances of divine interposition for their deliverance and their interest — in their deliverance from Egyptian bondage — their miraculous passage through the Red Sea — the promulgation of His law — the forbearance and long-suffering shown them amid their frequent rebellions — the signal triumphs given them over their enemies — their happy settlement in the promised land — and all the extraordinary blessings, both in the form of temporal prosperity and of religious privilege, with which His paternal goodness had favored them above all other people, they charge themselves with making a miserable requital. They confess their numerous and determined acts of disobedience. They read, in the loss of their national independence and their long captivity, the severe punishment of their sins. They acknowledge that, in all heavy and continued judgments upon their nation, God had done right, but they had done wickedly. And in throwing themselves on His mercy, they express their purpose of entering into a national covenant, by which they pledge themselves to dutiful obedience in future.

**22. *Moreover thou gavest them kingdoms and nations*** — that is, put them in possession of a rich country, of an extensive territory, which had been once occupied by a variety of princes and people.

***and didst divide them into corners*** — that is, into tribes. The propriety of the expression arose from the various districts touching at points or angles on each other.

*the land of Sihon, and the land of the king of Heshbon* — Heshbon being the capital city, the passage should run thus: “the land of Sihon or the land of the king of Heshbon.”

**32. *Now therefore, our God ... who keepeth covenant and mercy*** — God’s fidelity to His covenant is prominently acknowledged, and well it might; for their whole national history bore testimony to it. But as this could afford them little ground of comfort or of hope while they were so painfully conscious of having violated it, they were driven to seek refuge in the riches of divine grace; and hence the peculiar style of invocation here adopted: “Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the terrible God, who *keepeth covenant and mercy*.”

**36. *Behold, we are servants this day*** — Notwithstanding their happy restoration to their native land, they were still tributaries of a foreign prince whose officers ruled them. They were not, like their fathers, free tenants of the land which God gave them.

**37. *it yieldeth much increase unto the kings whom thou hast set over us because of our sins*** — Our agricultural labors have been resumed in the land — we plough, and sow, and till, and Thou blessest the work of our hands with a plentiful return; but this increase is not for ourselves, as once it was, but for our foreign masters, to whom we have to pay large and oppressive tribute.

*they have dominion over our bodies* — Their persons were liable to be pressed, at the mandate of their Assyrian conqueror, into the service of his empire, either in war or in public works. And our beasts are taken to do their pleasure.

**38. *we make a sure covenant, and write*** — that is, subscribe or sign it. This written document would exercise a wholesome influence in restraining their backslidings or in animating them to duty, by being a witness against them if in the future they were unfaithful to their engagements.



## CHAPTER 10

### <10:1> NEHEMIAH 10:1-27.

#### THE NAMES OF THOSE WHO SEALED THE COVENANT.

1. *Nehemiah, the Tirshatha* — His name was placed first in the roll on account of his high official rank, as deputy of the Persian monarch. All classes were included in the subscription; but the people were represented by their elders (<10:14> Nehemiah 10:14), as it would have been impossible for every one in the country to have been admitted to the sealing.

### <10:28> NEHEMIAH 10:28.

#### THE REST OF THE PEOPLE BOUND THEMSELVES TO OBSERVE IT.

Those who were not present at the sealing ratified the covenant by giving their assent, either in words or by lifting up their hands, and bound themselves, by a solemn oath, to walk in God's law, imprecating a curse upon themselves in the event of their violating it.

### <10:29> NEHEMIAH 10:29-39.

#### POINTS OF THE COVENANT.

29-37. *to observe and do all the commandments*, etc. — This national covenant, besides containing a solemn pledge of obedience to the divine law generally, specified their engagement to some particular duties, which the character and exigency of the times stamped with great urgency and importance, and which may be summed up under the following heads: that they abstain from contracting matrimonial alliances with the heathen; that they would rigidly observe the sabbath; that they would let the land enjoy

rest and remit debts every seventh year; that they would contribute to the maintenance of the temple service, the necessary expenses of which had formerly been defrayed out of the treasury of the temple (<sup><43B></sup>1 Chronicles 26:20), and when it was drained, given out from the king's privy purse (<sup><46B></sup>2 Chronicles 31:3); and that they would make an orderly payment of the priests' dues. A minute and particular enumeration of the first-fruits was made, that all might be made fully aware of their obligations, and that none might excuse themselves on pretext of ignorance from withholding taxes which the poverty of many, and the irreligion of others, had made them exceedingly prone to evade.

**32. *the third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God*** —

The law required every individual above twenty years of age to pay half a shekel to the sanctuary. But in consequence of the general poverty of the people, occasioned by war and captivity, this tribute was reduced to a third part of a shekel.

**34. *we cast the lots ... for the wood offering*** — The carrying of the wood had formerly been the work of the Nethinims. But few of them having returned, the duty was assigned as stated in the text. The practice afterwards rose into great importance, and JOSEPHUS speaks [*The Wars of the Jews*, 2.17, sect. 6] of the Xylophoria, or certain stated and solemn times at which the people brought up wood to the temple.

**38. *the priest the son of Aaron shall be with the Levites, when the Levites take tithes*** — This was a prudential arrangement. The presence of a dignified priest would ensure the peaceful delivery of the tithes; at least his superintendence and influence would tend to prevent the commission of any wrong in the transaction, by the people deceiving the Levites, or the Levites defrauding the priests.

***the tithing of the tithes*** — The Levites, having received a tenth of all land produce, were required to give a tenth of this to the priests. The Levites were charged with the additional obligation to carry the tithes when received, and deposit them in the temple stores, for the use of the priests.

**39. *and we will not forsake the house of our God*** — This solemn pledge was repeated at the close of the covenant as an expression of the intense zeal by which the people at this time were animated for the glory and the

worship of God. Under the pungent feelings of sorrow and repentance for their national sins, of which apostasy from the service of the true God was the chief, and under the yet fresh and painful remembrance of their protracted captivity, they vowed, and (feeling the impulse of ardent devotion as well as of gratitude for their restoration) flattered themselves they would never forget their vow, to be the Lord's.

# CHAPTER 11

## NEHEMIAH 11:1,2.

### THE RULERS, VOLUNTARY MEN, AND EVERY TENTH MAN CHOSEN BY LOT, DWELL AT JERUSALEM.

1. *the rulers ... dwelt at Jerusalem* — That city being the metropolis of the country, it was right and proper that the seat of government should be there. But the exigency of the times required that special measures should be taken to insure the residence of an adequate population for the custody of the buildings and the defense of the city. From the annoyances of restless and malignant enemies, who tried every means to demolish the rising fortifications, there was some danger attending a settlement in Jerusalem. Hence the greater part of the returned exiles, in order to earn as well as secure the rewards of their duty, preferred to remain in the country or the provincial towns. To remedy this state of things, it was resolved to select every tenth man of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin by lot, to become a permanent inhabitant of the capital. The necessity of such an expedient commended it to the general approval. It was the more readily submitted to because the lot was resorted to on all the most critical conjunctures of the Jewish history, and regarded by the people as a divine decision (~~1888~~ Proverbs 18:18). This awakened strongly the national spirit; and patriotic volunteers came forward readily to meet the wishes of the authorities, a service which, implying great self-denial as well as courage, was reckoned in the circumstances of so much importance as entitled them to the public gratitude. No wonder that the conduct of these volunteers drew forth the tribute of public admiration; for they sacrificed their personal safety and comfort for the interests of the community because Jerusalem was at that time a place against which the enemies of the Jews were directing a thousand plots. Therefore, residence in it at such a juncture was attended with expense and various annoyances from which a country life was entirely free.

## NEHEMIAH 11:3-36.

### THEIR NAMES.

**3. *the chief of the province*** — that is, Judea. Nehemiah speaks of it, as it then was, a small appendix of the Persian empire.

***in the cities of Judah dwelt every one in his possession in their cities*** — The returned exiles, who had come from Babylon, repaired generally, and by a natural impulse, to the lands and cities throughout the country which had been anciently assigned them.

***Israel*** — This general name, which designated the descendants of Jacob before the unhappy division of the two kingdoms under Rehoboam, was restored after the captivity, the Israelites being then united with the Jews, and all traces of their former separation being obliterated. Although the majority of the returned exiles belonged to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, they are here called Israel because a large number out of all the tribes were now intermingled, and these were principally the occupiers of the rural villages, while none but those of Judah and Benjamin resided in Jerusalem.

***the Levites*** — These took possession of the cities allotted to them according as they had opportunity.

***the Nethinims*** — A certain order of men, either Gibeonites or persons joined with them, who were devoted to the service of God.

**4. *at Jerusalem dwelt certain of the children of Judah*** — The discrepancy that is apparent between this (<sup>410B</sup>Nehemiah 11:4-36) and the list formerly given in <sup>430B</sup>1 Chronicles 9:1-9, arose not only from the Jewish and Oriental practice of changing or modifying the names of persons from a change of circumstances, but from the alterations that must have been produced in the course of time. The catalogue in Chronicles contains those who came with the first detachment of returned exiles, while the list in this passage probably included also those who returned with Ezra and Nehemiah; or it was most probably made out afterwards, when several had died, or some, who had been inserted as going on the journey, remained, and others came in their stead.

9. *overseer* — that is, “captain” or “chief.”

11. *the ruler of the house of God* — assistant of the high priest  
(<sup><403></sup>Numbers 3:32 <sup><391></sup>1 Chronicles 9:11 <sup><491></sup>2 Chronicles 19:11).

16. *the oversight of the outward business of the house of God* — that is, those things which were done outside, or in the country, such as the collecting of the provisions (<sup><329></sup>1 Chronicles 26:29).

17. *the principal to begin the thanksgiving in prayer* — that is, the leader of the choir which chanted the public praise at the time of the morning and evening sacrifice. That service was always accompanied by some appropriate psalm, the sacred music being selected and guided by the person named.

22. *the sons of Asaph, the singers were over the business of the house of God* — They were selected to take charge of providing those things which were required for the interior of the temple and its service, while to others was committed the care of the “outward business of the house of God” (<sup><411></sup>Nehemiah 11:16). This duty was very properly assigned to the sons of Asaph; for, though they were Levites, they did not repair in rotation to Jerusalem, as the other ministers of religion. Being permanent residents, and employed in duties which were comparatively light and easy, they were very competent to undertake this charge.

23. *it was the king’s commandment* — It was the will of the Persian monarch in issuing his edict that the temple service should be revived in all its religious fullness and solemnity. As this special provision for the singers is said to have been by the king’s commandment, the order was probably given at the request or suggestion of Ezra or Nehemiah.

24. *Pethahiah ... was at the king’s hand in all matters concerning the people* — This person was entrusted with judicial power, either for the interest, or by the appointment, of the Persian monarch, and his duty consisted either in adjusting cases of civil dispute, or in regulating fiscal concerns.

25. *some of the children of Judah dwelt at Kirjath-arba* — The whole region in which the villages here mentioned were situated had been completely devastated by the Chaldean invasion; and, therefore, it must be

assumed, that these villages had been rebuilt before “the children dwelt in them.”

**36. *And of the Levites were divisions in Judah, and in Benjamin* —**

Rather, there were divisions for the Levites; that is, those who were not resident in Jerusalem were distributed in settlements throughout the provinces of Judah and Benjamin.

# CHAPTER 12

## NEHEMIAH 12:1-9.

### PRIESTS AND LEVITES WHO CAME UP WITH ZERUBBABEL.

1. *these are the priests* — according to <sup><1301></sup>Nehemiah 12:7, “the chief of the priests,” the heads of the twenty-four courses into which the priesthood was divided (<sup><1301></sup>1 Chronicles 24:1-20). Only four of the courses returned from the captivity (<sup><1412></sup>Nehemiah 7:39-42 <sup><1512></sup>Ezra 2:36-39). But these were divided by Zerubbabel, or Jeshua, into the original number of twenty-four. Twenty-two only are enumerated here, and no more than twenty in <sup><1612></sup>Nehemiah 12:12-21. The discrepancy is due to the extremely probable circumstance that two of the twenty-four courses had become extinct in Babylon; for none belonging to them are reported as having returned (<sup><1712></sup>Nehemiah 12:2-5). Hattush and Maadiah may be omitted in the account of those persons’ families (<sup><1812></sup>Nehemiah 12:12), for these had no sons.

*Shealtiel* — or Salathiel.

*Ezra* — This was most likely a different person from the pious and patriotic leader. If he were the same person, he would now have reached a very patriarchal age — and this longevity would doubtless be due to his eminent piety and temperance, which are greatly conducive to the prolongation of life, but, above all, to the special blessing of God, who had preserved and strengthened him for the accomplishment of the important work he was called upon to undertake in that critical period of the Church’s history.

4. *Abijah* — one of the ancestors of John the Baptist (<sup><1908></sup>Luke 1:5).

9. *their brethren, were over against them in the watches* — that is, according to some, their stations — the places where they stood when officiating — “ward over against ward” (<sup><1624></sup>Nehemiah 12:24); or, according to others, in alternate watches, in course of rotation.



## -1420- NEHEMIAH 12:10-47.

### SUCCESSION OF THE HIGH PRIESTS.

**10. *Jeshua begat Joiakim***, etc. — This enumeration was of great importance, not only as establishing their individual purity of descent, but because the chronology of the Jews was henceforth to be reckoned, not as formerly by the reigns of their kings, but by the successions of their high priests.

**11. *Jaddua*** — It is an opinion entertained by many commentators that this person was the high priest whose dignified appearance, solemn manner, and splendid costume overawed and interested so strongly the proud mind of Alexander the Great; and if he were not this person (as some object that this Jaddua was not in office till a considerable period after the death of Nehemiah), it might probably be his father, called by the same name.

**12. *in the days of Joiakim were priests, the chief of the fathers*** — As there had been priests in the days of Jeshua, so in the time of Joiakim, the son and successor of Jeshua, the sons of those persons filled the priestly office in the place of their fathers, some of whom were still alive, though many were dead.

**23. *The sons of Levi ... were written in the book of the chronicles*** — that is, the public registers in which the genealogies were kept with great regularity and exactness.

**27-43. *at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem*** — This ceremony of consecrating the wall and gates of the city was an act of piety on the part of Nehemiah, not merely to thank God in a general way for having been enabled to bring the building to a happy completion, but especially because that city was the place which He had chosen. It also contained the temple which was hallowed by the manifestation of His presence, and anew set apart to His service. It was on these accounts that Jerusalem was called “the holy city,” and by this public and solemn act of religious observance, after a long period of neglect and desecration, it was, as it were, restored to its rightful proprietor. The dedication consisted in a

solemn ceremonial, in which the leading authorities, accompanied by the Levitical singers, summoned from all parts of the country, and by a vast concourse of people, marched in imposing procession round the city walls, and, pausing at intervals to engage in united praises, prayer, and sacrifices, supplicated the continued presence, favor, and blessing on “the holy city.” *“The assembly convened near Jaffa Gate, where the procession commences. Then (<sup>4623</sup>Nehemiah 12:31) I brought up the princes of Judah upon the wall (near the Valley Gate), and appointed two great companies of them that gave thanks, whereof one went on the right hand upon the wall towards the dung gate (through Bethzo). And after them went Hoshaiah, and half of the princes of Judah. And (<sup>4627</sup>Nehemiah 12:37) at the fountain gate, which was over against them, they (descending by the Tower of Siloam on the interior, and then reascending) 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 (by the staircase of the rampart, having descended to dedicate the fountain structures). And the other company of them that gave thanks went over against them (both parties having started from the junction of the first and second walls), 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 (beyond the corner gate). And from above the gate of Ephraim, and above the old gate (and the gate of Benjamin), 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 (or high gate, at the east end of the bridge). So stood the two companies of them that gave thanks in the house of God, and I, and half of the rulers with me (having thus performed the circuit of the investing walls), and arrived in the courts of the temple” [BARCLAY, *City of the Great King*].*

**43. *the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off*** — The events of the day, viewed in connection with the now repaired and beautified state of the city, raised the popular feeling to the highest pitch of enthusiasm, and the fame of their rejoicings was spread far and near.

**44. *portions of the law*** — that is, “prescribed by the law.”

***for Judah rejoiced for the priests and ... Levites that waited*** — The cause of this general satisfaction was either the full restoration of the temple

service and the reorganized provision for the permanent support of the ministry, or it was the pious character and eminent gifts of the guardians of religion.

**45. *the singers and the porters kept ... the ward of the purification*** — that is, took care that no unclean person was allowed to enter within the precincts of the sacred building. This was the official duty of the porters (<sup>4E39</sup>2 Chronicles 23:19), with whom, owing to the pressure of circumstances, it was deemed expedient that the singers should be associated as assistants.

**47. *all Israel ... sanctified holy things unto the Levites*** — The people, selecting the tithes and first-fruits, devoted them to the use of the Levites, to whom they belonged by appointment of the law. The Levites acted in the same way with the tithes due from them to the priests. Thus all classes of the people displayed a conscientious fidelity in paying the dues to the temple and the servants of God who were appointed to minister in it.

# CHAPTER 13

## NEHEMIAH 13:1-9.

### UPON THE READING OF THE LAW SEPARATION IS MADE FROM THE MIXED MULTITUDE.

**1. *On that day*** — This was not immediately consequent on the dedication of the city wall and gates, but after Nehemiah's return from the Persian court to Jerusalem, his absence having extended over a considerable period. The transaction here described probably took place on one of the periodical occasions for the public readings of the law, when the people's attention was particularly directed to some violations of it which called for immediate correction. There is another instance afforded, in addition to those which have already fallen under our notice, of the great advantages resulting from the public and periodical reading of the divine law. It was an established provision for the religious instruction of the people, for diffusing a knowledge and a reverence for the sacred volume, as well as for removing those errors and corruptions which might, in the course of time, have crept in.

***the Ammonite and the Moabite should not come into the congregation of God for ever*** — that is, not be incorporated into the Israelitish kingdom, nor united in marriage relations with that people (<sup><623B></sup>Deuteronomy 23:3,4). This appeal to the authority of the divine law led to a dissolution of all heathen alliances (<sup><369D></sup>Nehemiah 9:2 <sup><450B></sup>Ezra 10:3).

**4, 5. *before this*** — The practice of these mixed marriages, in open neglect or violation of the law, had become so common, that even the pontifical house, which ought to have set a better example, was polluted by such an impure mixture.

***Eliashib the priest ... was allied unto Tobiah*** — This person was the high priest (<sup><463B></sup>Nehemiah 13:28; also <sup><369D></sup>Nehemiah 3:1), who, by virtue of his dignified office, had the superintendence and control of the apartments attached to the temple. The laxity of his principles, as well as of his

practice, is sufficiently apparent from his contracting a family connection with so notorious an enemy of Israel as Tobiah. But his obsequious attentions had carried him much farther; for to accommodate so important a person as Tobiah on his occasional visits to Jerusalem, Eliashib had provided him a splendid apartment in the temple. The introduction of so gross an impropriety can be accounted for in no other way than by supposing that in the absence of the priests and the cessation of the services, the temple was regarded as a common public building, which might, in the circumstances, be appropriated as a palatial residence.

**6-9. *But in all this was not I at Jerusalem*** — Eliashib (concluding that, as Nehemiah had departed from Jerusalem, and, on the expiry of his allotted term of absence, had resigned his government, he had gone not to return) began to use great liberties, and, there being none left whose authority or frown he dreaded, allowed himself to do things most unworthy of his sacred office, and which, though in unison with his own irreligious character, he would not have dared to attempt during the residence of the pious governor. Nehemiah resided twelve years as governor of Jerusalem, and having succeeded in repairing and refortifying the city, he at the end of that period returned to his duties in Shushan. How long [Nehemiah] remained there is not expressly said, but “after certain days,” which is a Scripture phraseology for a year or a number of years, he obtained leave to resume the government of Jerusalem; to his deep mortification and regret, he found matters in the neglected and disorderly state here described. Such gross irregularities as were practiced, such extraordinary corruptions as had crept in, evidently imply the lapse of a considerable time. Besides, they exhibit the character of Eliashib, the high priest, in a most unfavorable light; for while he ought, by his office, to have preserved the inviolable sanctity of the temple and its furniture, his influence had been directly exercised for evil; especially he had given permission and countenance to a most indecent outrage — the appropriation of the best apartments in the sacred building to a heathen governor, one of the worst and most determined enemies of the people and the worship of God. The very first reform Nehemiah on his second visit resolved upon, was the stopping of this gross profanation [by Eliashib]. The chamber which had been polluted by the residence of the idolatrous Ammonite was, after undergoing the

process of ritual purification (<sup>Q1839</sup>Numbers 15:9), restored to its proper use — a storehouse for the sacred vessels.

## <sup>Q1839</sup>NEHEMIAH 13:10-14.

### NEHEMIAH REFORMS THE OFFICERS IN THE HOUSE OF GOD.

**10-13.** *And I perceived that the portions of the Levites had not been given them* — The people, disgusted with the malversations of Eliashib, or the lax and irregular performance of the sacred rites, withheld the tithes, so that the ministers of religion were compelled for their livelihood to withdraw to their patrimonial possessions in the country. The temple services had ceased; all religious duties had fallen into neglect. The money put into the sacred treasury had been squandered in the entertainment of an Ammonite heathen, an open and contemptuous enemy of God and His people. The return of the governor put an end to these disgraceful and profane proceedings. He administered a sharp rebuke to those priests to whom the management of the temple and its services was committed, for the total neglect of their duties, and the violation of the solemn promises which they had made to him at his departure. He upbraided them with the serious charge of having not only withheld from men their dues, but of having robbed God, by neglecting the care of His house and service. And thus having roused them to a sense of duty and incited them to testify their godly sorrow for their criminal negligence by renewed devotedness to their sacred work, Nehemiah restored the temple services. He recalled the dispersed Levites to the regular discharge of their duties; while the people at large, perceiving that their contributions would be no longer perverted to improper uses, willingly brought in their tithes as formerly. Men of integrity and good report were appointed to act as trustees of the sacred treasures, and thus order, regularity, and active service were re-established in the temple.

## NEHEMIAH 13:15-31.

### THE VIOLATION OF THE SABBATH.

**15-22. *In those days saw I in Judah some treading wine-presses on the sabbath*** — The cessation of the temple services had been necessarily followed by a public profanation of the Sabbath, and this had gone so far that labor was carried on in the fields, and fish brought to the markets on the sacred day. Nehemiah took the decisive step of ordering the city gates to be shut, and not to be opened, till the Sabbath was past; and in order to ensure the faithful execution of this order, he stationed some of his own servants as guards, to prevent the introduction of any commodities on that day. On the merchants and various dealers finding admission denied them, they set up booths outside the walls, in hopes of still driving a traffic with the peasantry; but the governor threatened, if they continued, to adopt violent measures for their removal. For this purpose a body of Levites was stationed as sentinels at the gate, with discretionary powers to protect the sanctification of the Sabbath.

**24. *could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people*** — a mongrel dialect imbibed from their mothers, together with foreign principles and habits.

**25. *cursed them*** — that is, pronounced on them an anathema which entailed excommunication.

***smote ... and plucked off their hair*** — To cut off the hair of offenders seems to be a punishment rather disgraceful than severe; yet it is supposed that pain was added to disgrace, and that they tore off the hair with violence as if they were plucking a bird alive.