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yet distinct from 'the prince that shall come', and is probably identical with 'the king of fierce countenance'—the king of the North—of Dan. 8:23.

(d) The Roman prince, having confirmed the covenant with Israel for 'a week' at the commencement of the seven years, will withdraw his protection after three and a half years, interfere with the Jewish religious rites and compel them to worship his image set up in their temple by the 'man of sin' (Rev. 13:15-16).

Thus *a Cessation of Jewish rites and sacrifices will be enforced*, for 'he shall cause the sacrifice and oblation to cease'. The 'desolate' upon whom wrath is to be poured out is Daniel's people Israel and his city Jerusalem, which are, as we have already noted, the chief concerns of this prophecy. The period of this desolation is limited to $3\frac{1}{2}$ years. Then will come

(e) *The Consummation for Israel and for Israel's oppressors*. The return of the Lord Jesus in power and glory will bring relief and salvation to Daniel's people (Zech. 12:9-10; 14:1-5) and destruction to the enemies of the Lord's Anointed and of His people (Rev. 19:11-21).

(To be continued)

THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

E. G. ASHBY, M.A., B.D.

3. Reformation (chs. 7-12)

Introduction. In the work of God it is not sufficient to make human efforts at reformation and re-organisation, however diligent. There must be a place for the Word of God, and in fact this is normally the primary cause in any move towards reformation, as was the case in the reign of Josiah, and in the great Reformation of the 16th century in Europe. In such cases reformation has some solid basis, being grounded on the promises and purposes of God. But the Word of God is a two-edged sword, and not infrequently first wounds those who seek to wield it. It is equally true that 'by the Law is the knowledge of sin', as that the 'statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart'—hence the mingled joy and sorrow on this occasion.

- Summary.** Ch. 7. Rule ch. 7:1-4.
 Register ch. 7:5-69.
 Record of gifts ch. 7:70-73.
 Ch. 8. Reading God's Word ch. 8:1-8.
 Rejoicing ch. 8:9-12.
 Regulating conduct. ch. 8:13-18.
 Ch. 9. Repentance and recollection of God's dealings.
 Ch. 10-12. Re-organisation.

Rule: On the completion of the building, preparations were made for the defence of the walls. It appears that those Temple officials not on duty in the Temple were made guardians of the gates. The Porters were a 'guild', a sort of trained 'police'. Nehemiah was probably contemplating a return to Persia, so he appointed Hanani and Hananiah in charge. The first had shown real interest in the city by his message in Chap. 1; the latter was ruler of the Palace, quite an important post. The city was to be put under certain regulations, the gates being opened later than usual: doubtless this was a necessary precaution in view of enemy activity.

One or two important principles arise here. It is not enough to set up a work for God, it must be maintained. To erect a building and start a Gospel testimony is not enough: even to come together for a Gospel meeting is insufficient. This must be guarded, and that requires the continued prayers of God's people to restrain the activity of the enemy. In the second place, there is the question of delegated authority. In so many mission fields the missionary is faced with just this need, to hand over to the indigenous Christians that it may be *truly* an indigenous church. But there are the elements of a problem here, just when and how and to whom to delegate this charge. Nehemiah did not do it till all the essential 'spade work' was finished, till it was quite safe to do so, and it may have been only so that he could give more of his attention to other aspects of the work as indicated in later chapters.

But it is good that the leader should share responsibility with others where possible. Hanani was marked out by his sympathetic interest, and Hananiah who was faithful in that which

was least (the palace) could obviously be entrusted with more, especially as he surpassed others in his devotion (v. 2). It seems (v. 4, cf. Zech. 8:13) that Nehemiah rebuilt in faith, for he rebuilt to the original size though the people were few. Though crowds were there for special occasions, few dwelt there. How true of many assemblies! Part of the reason, no doubt, was that many had settled down too comfortably in Babylonian exile to wish to return at the cost of some hardship, just as many settle down to the comfort of the world and are not ready to come out and adventure great things for God if cost of comfort and circumstances is involved.

But there is another aspect of the problem. Perhaps not many could be expected to come and *live* there till there were walls to defend them; and if we desire many to come to join our Christian testimony we must make adequate provision for them. There must be adequate feeding for their *souls* and other things ready for their spiritual well-being.

Register. This was not merely an idea of Nehemiah's, it was the leading of God's Spirit (v. 5), and Nehemiah was not averse from using existing means to this end. He found a register in the archives at Jerusalem. This shows only slight alteration from the list in Ezra ch. 2, being arranged as follows:

Men of the people of Israel	Priests,
households and families, towns and places	Levites, singers, porters, Nethinim, etc. and Miscellaneous

No doubt as Nehemiah planned to get fresh inhabitants for Jerusalem he wished to make sure he had pure Jews only. But there is an obvious *spiritual* analogy in this. It has been pointed out that the chapter opens with *watching* and ends with *worship*, and it is impossible for the 'natural man' to fit in here. Only those who can prove their birth as the spiritual Israel are empowered to 'watch', 'worship' and 'work'. Some could not find the evidence and were not allowed to have fellowship with the rest till the priest with the Divine guidance could investigate. Not all members of the professing church are members of the true Church which is His body, but all members are known to Him, the great High Priest, Christ.

Record of giving. The dram of gold was a 'daric', and the pound of silver a 'mina' (*maneh*) for which it is impossible to give anything like exact modern equivalents of money. Very old writers give them as being equivalent to £1.5.0., and £9, respectively, and though these cannot be at all accurate now, it is sufficient to indicate the costly nature of the gifts. The corresponding chapter in Ezra says they gave 'after their ability', both leaders and the ordinary people; and we may assume the same to be true here. The spiritual principle is to give 'as the Lord has prospered' us, and the Lord's commendation is for those who have 'done what they could'.

Reading God's Word. The great key note of this chapter is *love* for the Word of God and obedience to its precepts. That is always the way of blessing. Several points may here be noted:

(a) *Time:* The day on which they met, the first day of the 7th month, was the Feast of Trumpets; but did the people know this or did they merely celebrate the 1st day of the month? Later they are shown to be ignorant or forgetful of the requirements of the Feast of Tabernacles.

(b) *Reason:* This is a most interesting point—the initiative came from the people and they were unanimous about it! They did not meet because Nehemiah or Ezra or some other leader thought it right: they came, requesting Ezra to bring the Book of the Law. Here was a real hungering after the Word of God.

(c) *Procedure:* Prayer and worship preceded this public reading (v. 6), and the reading continued some six hours from early morning till midday, with others to help Ezra and with interruptions for exposition, to men, women and children 'able to understand'. They read distinctly, and gave the sense so that they understood. The Revised Version margin distinctly is 'with an interpretation', by which some understand that it was rendered into Aramaic for those no longer able to understand the Hebrew; while others deny this to be true till a later period. What is important is that they so gave the message that it was grasped and understood, a fundamental necessity for those who would be used of God: that is, a clear, distinct, careful reading

and the ability to give the meaning where required; not reading something *into* the text but expounding the text.

(d) *Result*: The result was as it always should be, adoration and worship, mingled with weeping as they realised their shortcomings.

Rejoicing. As this was a Holy Day they were bidden to refrain from weeping. It was to be a day of celebration and rejoicing for the 'joy of the Lord is your strength (or stronghold)'. When the believer is able to joy in God, with full confidence in His working and protection then he is strong. 'That My joy may be in you' was the Lord's desire. But it was also a day of fellowship, and the practice of sending portions to one another is recalled in Esther 9:19. Perhaps it also recalls the prescription in Deut. 16:14, that *all* were to rejoice at the Feast of Tabernacles, including the stranger, the fatherless and the widow. It is good to joy in the Lord, it is even better to be able to share that joy in a practical way with those for whom nothing is prepared.

Regulating Conduct. The 2nd day's reading was for the leaders, priests and Levites. At soon as they learnt about the Feast of Tabernacles they accommodated their conduct accordingly. That is a sound principle. 'Can two walk together except they be agreed?' The object of the reading of the Word of God is to learn His will and then to bring our lives into line with it, both in major doctrines of the faith and the outworking principles. As this Feast was from the 15th to the 22nd the people had plenty of time to prepare for it, but there is no mention made here of the Day of Atonement (10th day of the month).

Repentance and Recollection. Now, two days after the conclusion of the Feast, there came the time for a solemn review of the state of the nation. The spiritual life is a strange blending of two opposite states. It was the 'Man of Sorrows' Who spoke of His *joy*, and the Christian life is lived 'as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.' In fact, the deeper the repentance the more profound the joy. Here is a three hour session of reading, with three hours of confession and prayer. The subject of the prayer was as follows: The Election of Abraham, the Exodus from Egypt, the Experiences

in the wilderness and at Sinai, the Entrance into Canaan. All was based upon God's election—not upon human merit; and there is frequent reference to God's activity. There is also frequent repetition of phrases concerning their failures—see vs. 16, 17, 18, 26, 29, 30; and then the contrast—'Thou art just . . . we have done wickedly' (v. 33). Clearly they had learnt the lesson of human sin and failure, which is fundamental to any right relationship with God. Nor did they confine themselves to confessing the sins of others, of past generations, but brought it right down to their own lifetime. The contrast, too, was a painful one between God's ideal and their own experience. 'The land that Thou gavest unto our fathers to eat the fruit thereof . . . behold we are servants in it . . . because of our sins' (vs. 36, 37). How often this is true, those whom the Lord intended to have dominion are themselves dominated; while the Lord's purpose is that 'sin shall *not* have dominion over you:' we have to lament, 'the evil that I would not, *that* I do.' But they do not stay down in the slough of despond because of sin: having confessed it, they seek a renewal of the covenant (v. 38). Most great times of blessing, both in the Bible and in the history of the Christian Church seem to be linked up with very similar experiences of confession of sin and repentance accompanying it.

Re-organisation. A list of names is given of those sealing the covenant—priests, Levites, and leaders. This is followed by a summary of the obligations of the covenant; to abstain from heathen marriage alliances, to observe the Sabbath and Sabbatic year, to contribute to the Temple and priests' expenses.

An enumeration of 'First-fruits' is given so that none may excuse themselves under pretext of ignorance, and the offering of tithe is duly regulated. Details of these points will come before us in chap. 13. Here we may note the genuine nature of their repentance, for in chap. 10:29 they bind themselves by a solemn oath and curse to walk in God's Law and to abstain from wilful violations of it. God's Word is to have the pre-eminent place. Then follow extracts from the registers and public lists, giving names of dwellers in Jerusalem, towns and villages occupied by the Jews, a list of priests and Levites connected with Zerubbabel's

return; then the genealogy of the High Priests; a further list of priests and heads of Levitical families.

It is worthy of note that beyond the rulers, the inhabitants of Jerusalem were to be chosen by lot. Perhaps it was considered burdensome and dangerous to dwell there, for the people blessed those who willingly *offered*, and of the remainder one in ten was selected by lot for Jerusalem. Here is a little reminder for the people of God that it is good for them to be in the place of His choosing.

God, too, has His record of those who have any part to play in the spiritual Jerusalem, and no sacrifice for Him will pass unnoticed and without reward. This section concludes with a description of the dedication of the walls and the account of the Levitical organisation concerning the Temple. While we live in a dispensation characterised by the freedom and liberty of the Holy Spirit, it is well to be reminded that our God is a God of order, Who likes all to be done decently and in order.

(To be concluded next issue)

THE PRELUDE TO THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM OF CHRIST

W. FRASER NAISMITH, Scotland

Read: Daniel 2:31-45; 9:24-27; Rev. 6; 8: 1; Isa. 10:5-7; 20-21

Sir Edward Denny made the following observation during his ministry—'Daniel's seventy weeks is the backbone of prophecy'. Most prophetic students agree with this but unfortunately many of the skeletons suffer from curvature of the spine! It should be observed that Daniel's seventy weeks has much to do with Gentile Imperialism.

God chose Israel, and as a nation she was distinctively for God, who, through the lips of Balaam in Numbers 23:9 stated, 'the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations.' This people of divine choice proved unfaithful and