

# Nehemiah

Readings with G. Davison extracted from "Precious Things" 1956-1990

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## Nehemiah 1.

The point in mind in suggesting this book is not to dwell so much on the historical side, important as that is, but rather to see its moral features. We have the break-up of the things of God as seen in the condition of Jerusalem; the purpose of heart of one man, in spite of great opposition, to go on with what he knew to be in accord with the mind of God; and we notice also the divine support, directly and providentially, that accompanied his exercises. The book could be described in one word, "Recovery". We shall refer briefly to the historical side, but hope to dwell more on the features that God commends and supports in days when He had it in view to bring about recovery in conditions where divine interests are in disrepair.

If the books of Ezra and Nehemiah are carefully read it will be seen that each book is divided into two parts. In the book of Ezra, the first part deals with the rebuilding of the house, and the remaining part relates to the re-establishment of the order of service. In between those two sections there are 60 years, and in those 60 years the happenings of the book of Esther took place, showing that God in sovereign mercy maintained His people in view of His own service being re-established. In the book of Nehemiah we see that the first six chapters deal with the repairing of the wall, and then in the following chapters we see that when the principle of separation has again been established, divine instruction is made available for God's people.

The history covered by the book of Nehemiah, including the defeat of one great power by another, and the various movements of the Jews to Jerusalem, is extremely interesting, but what we desire to notice is the moral features of the man of God who, under great opposition, and in great weakness, stood for the will of God. The personal devotion of a man in service to God and His people shines in this book.

Would what is mentioned in the opening verses-rejection, reproach, breakdown, etc.-indicate the need for such a moral awakening in our hearts today? Are not such conditions around us today in a moral sense?

Yes! It will be seen as we proceed that it is distinctly analogous to our day.

Do you connect Haggai and Zechariah with Ezra, and Malachi with Nehemiah?

Yes! There is a striking thing in Malachi, that is the recurrence of the words, "My name, my name"; and doubtless that is one of the things which moved Nehemiah at this time (see verse 9).

Does that give a moral connection with our day, with the Philadelphian features in which one of the things seen is that the name of Christ has not been denied?

In regard to what has been said as to recovery and also as to Philadelphia, there was probably quite a long time between the recovery in Ezra's day and the actual building of the wall. Has that a particular reference to our day in contrast to the recovery of the truth about 140 years ago?

It would seem that these two books cover about 120 years of history, and that rather does fit in with our day. Ezra seems to have moved on the ecclesiastical side of things, whereas Nehemiah was more on the line of the kingdom; he was a governor, Ezra was a priest. Is it not true that the early brethren brought out the ecclesiastical side of the truth, and then came the truth of the Kingdom with a view to preserving those divine things which God had recovered to His people?

Must we be recovered to the *truth*, before we can truly walk in separation?

The temple was built first, then Ezra instructs the people in regard to their relationship to God. Nehemiah was anxious about the wall, and then he has to do with the people *inside* the wall, not *outside* of it. What we are badly needing today is a stirring up as to the value of what God has given to us, so that we do not lose our heritage.

It is interesting to notice that Nehemiah's exercise was in relation to God's people; it is not until the very end that he speaks of his official position; his exercises did not lie in the region of his service to the king of Persia, although quite obviously God moved that great monarch to be sympathetic towards the exercise, but the whole exercise of Nehemiah stood in relation to God's people. His prayer was mainly in the past tense, he was reminding God of what the people were to Him, and what He had done for them; he was dwelling upon the faithfulness of God, and not upon the people's unfaithfulness. That is a characteristic of a true servant.

Circumstantially, Nehemiah was not on divine territory, He was in Shushan which was, I suppose, Persian territory; but he was there in the governmental ordering of God; his heart was not there. One of the things we perhaps need to remember is, to quote the remark of another, "That while providence put Moses into Egypt, faith took him out of it"; and here we see a man providentially in Shushan, the palace, but faith took him out of it; and took him in divine exercise of heart, under the hand of God, back to divine territory.

It is quite obvious that his heart was not set upon the expansion of the Persian empire, but upon the recovery of God's people. We, too, may be legitimately held upon what we may refer to as not being divine territory, we have to do our work, but in such a sphere our affections can be true to the interests of God.

Not one detail of divine purpose will ever fail, but our exercise should be to be moving in line with it. Here was a man with faith enough to discern the mind of God, and who sought grace from God that he might answer to it. We see how God answered his desires.

Is there any significance in the names of the three men who are mentioned? Nehemiah-"whom Jehovah comforts"; Hachaliah-"Wait upon Jehovah"; and Hanani-"Jehovah will be gracious".

Yes! Their names would show that they were men who valued their relationship with God himself and with the people of God.

We might notice that between the month Chislew mentioned in verse 1 of our chapter, and the month Nisan mentioned in Nehemiah 2: 1, there is a period of several months. We see therefore that Nehemiah's prayer and exercise were sustained. The Lord Himself commended continuance in prayer,

and we need in our day to "continue in prayer" so that we may receive an answer from God to our exercises.

It is obvious from verse 2 that Nehemiah's concern was related to the state of Jerusalem. News as to the state of God's interests reached him providentially, he was not in Jerusalem himself. What sadness of heart the report occasioned him; "great affliction and reproach; the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire". What a reproach that was, because we read "Thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise" (Isa. 60: 18).

It would be right for the saints of God to be concerned about that which answers to these things today.

Yes, indeed! It is both surprising and encouraging what even one saint can do if truly exercised as to the interests of God.

It is apparent from verse 4 that Nehemiah was well occupied during the months that have been referred to; "I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed *before the God of heaven*".

Do you also think that God, knowing the exercise of this man's heart, moved at His own appropriate time by sending these brethren who made him acquainted with the condition of things?

I quite think that! It is all part of what we speak of as the providential working of God. Nehemiah moves in the energy of desire and of faith, and at the same time God in His own time moved in relation to the vessel He had prepared.

In verse 5 Nehemiah uses three names of God, and they are of special importance. The words in the Hebrew are, "Jehovah"-which is His covenant name with Israel; "Elohim"-which is His supremacy in the universe; "El"-which speaks of the might that God has at His disposal to carry out every detail of His will, it is the "Mighty God".

It is obvious that Nehemiah knew God as expressed by these names. Would it raise the exercise with us as to whether we know God in the way in which He can be known in our dispensation?

A fourth name is used in verse 11, "Adonai"-a divine name which means "the Lord in blessing", and it is beautiful to see the way he leaves that name till verse 11. First he owns the rights of God, and the power of God to sustain His rights, and finally he appeals to God as the source of all blessing for His people. And it is in that verse he is able to speak of those "who *delight* to fear Thy name" (New Trans.). It is one thing to call upon God to help us, but it is a much more blessed matter to be truly transparent and to tell God that we delight in the way in which we know Him; Nehemiah does both.

Does not Nehemiah indicate here that he is taking account of the potential value of the children of Israel to God in spite of their departure from Him? It is very blessed the way in which he speaks not only of "Thy servant" but "the children of Israel Thy servants". Who would have thought there was any value at all in those people at that time? We do well in the present day of breakdown to regard the saints in relation to what they can be and should be for God.

In his appeal to God in verse 6, his desire is, "Let Thine ear now be attentive, and Thine eyes open". In verse 9 he reminds God of His promise "to set My name there". He mentions God's ear, God's eyes and God's Name. In 2 Chr. 6: 40, Solomon says, "Now, my God, let, I beseech Thee, Thine eyes be open, and let Thine ears be attent unto the prayer that is made in this place". In the next chapter, verse 15, we have God's answer to Solomon's prayer; "Now Mine eyes shall be open, and Mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place. For now have I chosen and sanctified this house, that My name may be there for ever; and Mine eyes and *Mine heart* shall be there perpetually." Nehemiah comes to God and reminds Him of this wonderful promise, desiring that God would keep His promise at that time.

The *excess* seen in 2 Chr. 7 is delightful; both Solomon and Nehemiah ask that God's *eyes* and God's *ears* be attent, but God adds to that and says, "*My heart*". It is blessed to see that not only God's eyes and ears are towards His people, but His heart is towards them too.

If Nehemiah was to be used of God in the recovery of the people, it was necessary that he should feel their condition in his own spirit, and associate himself personally with the failure. In the New Testament we have in Paul and Timothy and others, servants who felt the condition of the people of God and wept over them. Indeed the Lord wept over Jerusalem.

In what way could we confess the sins of the people today (v. 6)?

We may see the breakdown and speak one to the other of it. But how necessary to carry the matter in the spirit of humiliation and confession in prayer before God, owning our own part in it all.

Is there not a similar condition among the people of God today? And whilst perhaps none of us have been exercised as Nehemiah was, yet how much could be done if one was so exercised.

Those who brought the report to him must have been exercised too.

It would be a happy thing if what is now being said promotes such exercise amongst us.

In general our prayers should be articulate, but what is really important is what we are in our spirits. It is quite obvious that Nehemiah was carrying this matter upon his *spirit*; he could not pray audibly whilst serving the king. In our work, and in places where we cannot be praying audibly, we ought to be carrying these exercises on our *spirits*, and whilst not claiming the faithfulness which marked Nehemiah, yet we can say that we do feel these things in measure.

How often we have found that when one person is exercised as to these things and taken them up with God, it is not long before others come to light as having the same mind.

The feature of gravity is seen in Nehemiah, but alongside the gravity we get the expression "The joy of the Lord is your strength"; both these features should be present in our exercises today.

In verse 6 we read, "We have sinned against Thee", but Nehemiah adds, "Both and *my father's house* have sinned". "We have dealt very corruptly against Thee". We might have thought that with a man like Nehemiah it was just the other way round, but that is what he says to God. "And have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which Thou commandest Thy servant Moses". They had been downright disobedient to the things of God, and that is where trouble always commences.

The thing which causes a great deal of exercise today is that there are so few marked by obedience in gathering to the name of the Lord. I see very little movement of saints in this way.

I think that raises a very important issue, and we ought to face it. We may not be able to do much about it except to mourn and weep and pray, but we *can* do those things. There are thousands today who do not know the truth, but our responsibility is to live it before them.

There was one spot for God in the whole of this earth at that time, and Nehemiah knew that it was at Jerusalem, because there was the only place where God had ever placed His name. If we get the moral truth of that into our affections, that there is *now* a centre where the Lord has placed His name, it will be the one place where we shall desire to be, and where we shall devote ourselves to the interests of the Lord.

Regarding the remark about saints not having the truth, is there any responsibility on our part to take it to them?

Not if it places us in conditions that are not according to the present mind of God. If opportunity is given to help people regarding the truth, I hope we shall not miss that opportunity; but we cannot compromise what we know to be of God in order to help somebody else.

When Joshua was outside the camp he never went back, "Joshua departed not out of the tabernacle". They went out to him, didn't they?

That is right! Moses was acting for God, and Joshua remained outside of that which was dishonouring to God.

In regard to the matter which has been raised, was not the difficulty in Nehemiah's day that the enemy had destroyed the wall, and hence there was no separation?

That is what we sought to show in relation to the division of the books. The people could not be re-instructed as to divine principles until the centre was established; the wall is built, and *then* the people are re-instructed as to the features that should mark them. Had we as brethren maintained the truth of separation, perhaps others would have been attracted to us.

A great multitude went out from Egypt; only two of them went into the promised land, the men of faith.

Well, Nehemiah certainly did not lack faith. He laid hold first of all on the greatness of God, and the power of God, and the result was that he had but a small appreciation of the power that is in the hands of men. In the end of verse 11 we read, "Prosper, I pray Thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this *man*". Nehemiah recognizes that this great monarch was but a man in the sight of God, yet a man whom God would use for His own purpose.

Why then does he afterwards say "For I was the king's cup-bearer"?

Well! That was his occupation.

When addressing the king personally, Nehemiah would have to give him his title, he would call him "great", which was the usual salutation for monarchs, but here he reserves greatness for God and, as *before God*, speaks of the king as "this *man*".

It is delightful the way in which Nehemiah associates others with him; he was quite sure others must be praying as he was; but it seems that as a special vessel he was being prepared of heart, and God was about to prepare him further.

He describes his official position in just six words at the end of the chapter, but how many times in these months of waiting and of preparation he must have spoken to God in prayer as to the interests of God Himself.

We can be assured that if one has such desires, and continues in them before God, God will use that man for His own glory.

## Nehemiah 2

The month Chislev, of which we read in Nehemiah 1, is the equivalent of our December, and Nisan, of which we read in Nehemiah 2, is equivalent to our April; hence Nehemiah evidently continued in prayer for a period of about four months, seeking that God might open His hand in the restoration of His people. December would perhaps indicate the decline of things, whereas April suggests the time of sowing with a view to another harvest; there may be this moral link between the two. We certainly see a new beginning in this chapter, and if the four months was a period of inactivity externally, waiting

before God that God might answer, this chapter from first to last has movement in view, a movement which commenced when the right moment came.

It is important to notice that whilst Nehemiah may have wondered how and when he should make the first move, God saw to it that the king himself moved first; God thus answered the continued exercise of those months. Sometimes when we are exercised as to a matter, and feel sure that the exercise is of God, we are perhaps in danger of being a little too impatient instead of waiting upon God.

We shall never see our way through an exercise in a godly sense unless we really feel the *burden* of it; that is the outstanding feature of these four months, months in which Nehemiah must have felt deeply the condition of Jerusalem. But these months were not wasted, and if we were more ready to await God's time, we should find that things would move much more quickly and successfully than they would have done by our own activities.

Is dedication to the interests of God the keynote of Nehemiah's exercises?

I am sure of that! God's interests should command our *first* attention, they are not to be neglected. These exercises did not hinder Nehemiah in his service to his earthly master, and we find him following his daily routine; yet his exercise is with him all the time. We all have our pathways of responsibility in this world, but we also can carry an exercise before God, quietly going on in our daily work until God Himself intervenes.

The attitude that marked Nehemiah was the result of his affections having been drawn out in relation to the condition of that which was precious to the heart of God. The king was able to discern that this was something deeper than that which was merely physical, for he says "Thou are not sick". It was something much deeper; Nehemiah's spirit was burdened and troubled because of what he had heard concerning the interests of God in Jerusalem.

Why does Nehemiah say, "Then I was very sore afraid"? Is that the natural man coming in?

Well, it was an insult to such a monarch for any servant, and especially *this* servant, to be sad in his presence. The king considered himself great enough to affect everyone of his servants with the merriment of the court, and not to be so affected could have endangered Nehemiah's life.

Does not this all show that, however impossible the circumstances *appeared* to be, God as above them all? Nehemiah, as any one of us would have been, was afraid because he was in the presence of a man with absolute power. He had power to send Nehemiah to his death and Nehemiah, knowing that, made his first request not to the king but to *God*. Under the hand of God it was the monarch who asked Nehemiah what his request was; but he *prayed to the God of heaven*. Circumstances, under the hand of God, may be turned in our favour but it is God Himself we should have before us.

Would you say that the king's action would suggest what is providential and governmental under God as favouring the testimony?

Yes! God is in complete control and Nehemiah, as being near to God, knew that and so he *prayed to God*.

God can make the very circumstances in which we are found to yield the very resources needed for His interests, and that is what happened here. Nehemiah had no resources in himself, he was but a servant; but God so ordered the circumstances that not only were they propitious towards him but they yielded the very resources that he needed.

"Who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will"

Yes! And here is a man in line with that, and with an exercise of heart and a readiness that God was able to use. I must say that I have been struck with the close link in this incident between God and the king. We have the secular side and the spiritual side, and they are seen moving together without any discord. It would appear to be normal that this should be; if otherwise, there may perhaps be something wrong. I am not speaking of opposition or of persecution, but if some service I am engaged in is reflecting adversely upon my home or some other circle, then I very much doubt whether God is with me in it. The two sides should be going on together, the service of God and one's secular service.

Why does Nehemiah, when questioned by the king, ask that he might go to his fathers' sepulchres?

It may suggest that he is looking back to former generations, "my fathers"; this was the place *they* belonged to, where *they* were born, where *they* lived, and where *they* died in the service of God; and Nehemiah desired to see that place maintained.

He emphasizes "The *place* of my fathers' sepulchres"; he does not say the place of my fathers' achievements. As generation had succeeded generation upon divine territory, Nehemiah seems to say that that is the place where he ought to be, maintaining what they maintained when they were there.

The emphasis does not appear to be on the sepulchres, but on the *fathers*.

That which was definitely before Nehemiah was the *city*, and is it not very interesting and challenging that, after carrying this burden for months, when challenged in relation to it he could speak of it so definitely? He knew exactly what he wanted, he was not vague in his exercise; he could put the exercise of four months into one sentence and say exactly what he desired.

In the previous chapter, as sorrowing, Nehemiah had said, "I and my father's house have sinned"; but when speaking to the king he refers to his fathers' sepulchres. It would appear to set forth his faith; the commandments had been broken by his forefathers, but he does not refer to that in the king's presence, he is looking to the fulfilment of the promises that God had made.

That is a very good point; he did not say to the king, the place where my fathers have sinned. Before the *king* he speaks of divine territory, before *God* he says "Both I and my father's house *have sinned*".

Another very interesting point is seen in verse 4. When the king says "For what dost thou make request?", Nehemiah does not immediately reply. He first lifts his heart to God, and God puts into his heart what he should say to the king. That is similar to what the Lord said, "And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto the magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say; for the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say" (Luke 12: 11, 12). So Nehemiah "prayed to the God of heaven".

The "God of heaven" is a remarkable title to be introduced by Nehemiah into the narrative of his dealings with this great king. We, in our day, have little conception of the splendour and greatness of the monarchy in those days, but it was not this overt greatness that was in the mind of Nehemiah, but the God of heaven. He recognized that, however great and important the circumstances around him were, it was the heavens that rule, and he was in conscious touch with the God of heaven. God will not assert His title as the God of the *earth* until the coming day of which the book of Revelation speaks, but He is still "God of heaven", supreme in the universe, though as yet He is not laying claim to the earth.

Why did Nehemiah accept an escort, when *Ezra* did not?

The circumstances would appear to be entirely different. *Ezra* was carrying the vessels of the service of God; his was a more spiritual matter having to do with the re-establishment of the worship of God. But this was more outward, a governmental setting.

Ezra was a priest, his genealogy is traced back to Aaron. The Holy Spirit of God gives us the genealogy of Ezra to show the priestly character of that book, and if we introduce secular things into the worship of God we are on very dangerous ground.

The answer to this question would be seen in the end of verse eight, "And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me"; the request was in accord with divine wisdom. Whilst the resources were in the hand of the king, it was God who was behind it all. We must see that there is a striking moral difference between the service of Nehemiah and that of Ezra.

Do you think that Nehemiah *did* ask for a force? From the end of verse nine it would appear that it was a concession on the part of the king.

I think that it was an excess. It has not been suggested that Nehemiah asked for it; he asked for certain things and the king gave him an excess. "He granted me according to the good hand of my God upon me".

He apparently had three things before him; the palace, the house and the wall of the city. They would all speak of divine things, and they all needed preserving. If the palace and the house were to be preserved, then the wall of the city must be built.

In verse 8 Nehemiah says, "That he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace". When David, in an entirely different day from this, was collecting material for the house of God, the first thing he had in mind was the doors. "Nails for the doors of the house". It seems to be an important point that the gates, or doors, should be set up in their right position.

The palace would perhaps refer to what we should call the Town Hall; the house, of course, was the place of divine service; and the walls would safeguard both. There is the need today for preserving divine administration among the saints in regard to what we know to be the rights of God among His people; hence it is important to see that the gates have a prominent place in the thought of Nehemiah.

Then we see that there was the palace as well as the house. The palace would be suggestive of the many hortatory remarks we have at the end of the epistles as to right conduct and matters of order. How can a man move aright in relation to the house of God unless his own house and his own affairs are in order? There are certain things in the government of God that we must submit to if we are to move in a right way in the sphere of God's house.

The palace may be called the "fortress"; the place where things are guarded; and the truths made known in the epistles are guarded by their practical expression in the lives of the saints.

It has been pointed out that Haggai, when encouraging the people, speaks first to the governor and then to the priest. We may be sure that, if we are not moving aright in relation to the governmental ways of God and are not subject to Him in the administration of divine things, we cannot expect His blessing in the house character. I am persuaded that the truth is maintained in our practical answer to these things.

There is much detail in between the two statements "I prayed to the God of heaven" and "The king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me". Nehemiah recognized where his resources were, and he also recognized that in giving them to him God, in His sovereignty, used the secular power. Nehemiah did not ask for them from the secular power, he asked of God, and he recognized that they came from God.

In verses 9, 10 and 11 there is another point that we do well to note. Nehemiah arrives at his objective, at least he came to the governors beyond the river, but he himself says in verse 11, "So I came to Jerusalem". All his troubles were not over when he left the king's palace; he ran into a completely

different set of exercises in the intensive opposition which was forthcoming from Sanballat and Tobiah.

The differing circumstances in which Nehemiah was found bring to light three distinctive moral features. In the four months already referred to, we see the *burden which he was carrying*, in the presence of the king what comes to light is the *definiteness of his desire*; but when in the presence of the opposition, as seen in verse 10 of our chapter, we see the *purity of his motive*. It is when the servant is marked by purity of motive that the opposition is overcome. If the service of God is not undertaken in absolute purity of motive, then the enemy has a point of attack, but when the motive is entirely pure the enemy is absolutely impotent, he cannot harm us. He may attempt it, he may harass us, he may even depress us, but he cannot stop the exercise. Nehemiah was a man who had come to see after the welfare of God's people, his motive was pure. He was misunderstood, and even maligned; they said that he was a rebel against the king. Other servants of God have been so spoken against, but with them there has been purity of motive to serve the saints, and they have gone through in triumph.

It says that Sanballat and Tobiah were grieved "exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel". Later they pretended to treat the matter with disdain, but it is apparent that this was unreal; they knew they were faced by a man of resolute purpose, and they set out to attack him. When God raises up a man the enemy instinctively prepares to attack.

Let us look to our motives in service, whatever that service may be; if our motives are pure we shall not be immune from attack by the enemy, but the attack will fail in its objective.

Now we see a further movement in verse 12, where we read, "And I arose in the night". This would be in contrast to Nehemiah 1: 4, where we read that Nehemiah "sat down". In chapter 1 it was right for him to sit and weep, but now it is a time to "arise".

It was not the normal time to get up and start work!

No! He would appear to be still carrying out his *own* exercise; others would share it later. Apparently he rose up that he might view the city for himself. As a wise man he would make himself acquainted with the true condition of things, before attempting to commence the work of recovery. As taking the lead in the matter he wished to be fully aware of all that was needed.

Three more features are seen in this section. From verse 11 to verse 16 we find that which we may speak of as investigation, a diagnosing of the position. It is always a good thing to consider a matter calmly and quietly, taking account of it from every viewpoint. From verse 17 to verse 18 we see Nehemiah calling his brethren into fellowship with him in the exercise. He investigates it *himself*, and we too must have our own impression of an exercise, but as having these personal impressions we ought not to move on independent lines; we should seek the fellowship of our brethren. Then in the 19th verse, as the opposition shows itself again, what marks Nehemiah is an absolute determination to carry the thing through. Investigation, fellowship, and then determination; and we need these three things as facing the exercises of the present day.

Referring to the three days of verse 11, would they be suggestive of resurrection? We read in Hosea 6: 2, "In the third day He will raise us up".

Would these three days involve separation from his previous circumstances, so that he might be in the hands of God?

That is what I think our brother has in mind; the verse in Hosea reads, "After two days will He revive us; in the third day He will raise us up". There is the transfer from one thing to the other with a view to the new beginning. We see the truth of it in the Scripture which says, "Christ died for our sins

according to the Scriptures, and . . . was buried". That is the end of the old condition. "He rose again the third day"-that is the beginning of the new order of things.

After he makes the exercise known to his brethren (v. 17) it would appear that the enemy brings up reinforcements (v. 19); the Arabian is added. They realized there were now others with similar exercises who were prepared to move with Nehemiah.

We know from the New Testament that Satan himself is opposed to the truth.

In that connection is it encouraging to keep before us the fact that the Spirit of God is just as active as ever? The ruin in that day was great, and it is so today, but the Holy Spirit is moving with perfect knowledge of the conditions which obtain at the present moment.

We, too, are not to act as though the ruin did not exist. Nehemiah *waited*, and went by night to view the situation, hence he knew perfectly well what was at stake and what was needed. Some ask why we cannot do today exactly the same as was done 100 years ago, but the present ruin is too great. We have to seek guidance to move, as helped of the Lord, as recognizing present conditions and seeking by His help to move through.

When Nehemiah called in his brethren we read "Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me, as also the king's word that he had spoken unto me". Note again that he puts the matter as it stands in relation to God first; he does not overlook the fact that the king had been favourable towards him, but he acknowledges that it all came because God's hand was upon him.

The fountain and the king's pool appear to have been damaged in this chapter.

What he found was that all the resources were cut off, and the point was, as to how they were to be opened up again. We are quite assured the hand of God was not shortened. God said to His people through the prophet, "Who hath despised the day of small things?" (Zech. 4: 10). God called their attention to the fact that it was a day of "small things", but He gave His people what was needed for the moment, and blessed them in it. Nehemiah, recognising that God's hand was upon him for good, and as moving in the power of that knowledge, had said "Let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach" (v. 17), and his brethren responded by saying "Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work" (v. 18).

In verse 18 we come to the thought of consecration, which means "the hands filled". We need not only devotion, that is having right desires, but we need also the material to get on with the work. That is indeed the main thought in view in meetings like these. The desires are already there before coming to the meeting, but if God fills our hands with a little more divine material then the meetings are worth while. I think we know that consecration simply means the filling of the hands. Aaron was sanctified, which would be by water; then we read of his dedication, which was by blood on the ear, the thumb and the great toe. That was followed by consecration, the hands were filled with the preciousness of the sacrifice. If our hands are not filled with divine material we are incapable of serving God.

When "Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian", said with scorn, "What is this thing that ye do? Will ye rebel against the king?", the striking thing is that Nehemiah does not fall back on the *king's* authority, he falls back on God Himself. He could have said, "See these letters which I have from the king", but instead he said "The God of heaven, He will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build". His enemies might have said, "Are you not the servant of the king?", but again and again in this chapter we see that his whole exercise stood in relation to God.

Nehemiah regarded these people in the same way in which the apostle regarded the sorcerer when he said, "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter"; he discerned who he was (Acts 8: 21).

It was a very subtle thrust "Will ye rebel against the king?", but they met it in the consciousness that they were moving before God. They were God's servants, and could say, "The God of heaven, He will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build", If there is the conscious sense in the soul that what we do has divine approval, we can leave all opposition to God. Paul's advice to Timothy was "study to shew thyself *approved unto God*" (2 Tim. 2: 15); the more the opposition increased, the more Nehemiah was determined to carry on with the work.

Would you say there was increasing apprehension with Nehemiah? This is the third time he mentions the God of heaven; previously he had besought and prayed, now he has the consciousness of divine support.

That is very good!

Later in these readings when we come to the actual building of the wall, we shall hope to see the features of the men who did the work. Malachi brings in the last *moral* word from God, when it seemed that the very people who were inside that wall were seeking to break it down again. Nehemiah closes the book historically, but Malachi closes it morally; and we see the features of a generation approved of God carried right through, and appearing again in Simeon and Anna, Elizabeth and Mary in the beginning of Luke, those that spake together in the hill country of Judæa; morally the same generation. Our exercise should be that these features might be seen in us.

Have you not found as a practical fact today that people who will not regard the principle of separation, which the walls suggest, are in danger of losing the truth of the assembly completely?

The challenge comes to each of us as to whether we value the truth sufficiently to make a stand for it, and seek to keep in accord with it in all our movements and associations as God gives us grace. The moment we move from it, we are on slippery ground.

The word to Philadelphia was "Hold that fast which thou hast" (Rev. 3: 11). We have reached Laodicean conditions, but the truth that was available to Philadelphia is still with us to help us.

### **Nehemiah 3: 1-15.**

In the section of Nehemiah we are now considering we arrive at what is perhaps the crucial point in the whole book. Nehemiah's chief exercise was the restoration of the walls of Jerusalem, and along with that the restoration of the city in its relation to the thoughts of God. We have seen his own personal exercise as before the Lord, and then the way in which he made the matter known to his brethren. Now in this chapter we see them rising up to accomplish the task that had been laid upon the heart of Nehemiah. As we take account of the various ones who were engaged in the work, it should be an encouragement to us in our day, however small our place may be in the sphere of divine interests, for there is the need for each one to be set for the maintenance of separation from all that is inconsistent with the truth that has been given to us.

It is important to see that the first man mentioned is Eliashib. In his name we have the suggestion that God is a "God who will restore". He and his brethren builded the sheep gate, the point from which the work commenced and also at which it finished. We learn from the 5th chapter of John's gospel that the sheep gate is connected with Bethesda-the house of mercy. The principle of sovereignty in mercy thus characterizes the work throughout.

Then, too, we see that with Eliashib a *priestly* lead was given. Days of recovery bring to light men who know what it is to spend time in priestly conditions in the presence of God and we can be assured that the lead given by such men will be blessed of God. There was a defect in Eliashib, as we shall see, but as the priestly leader of the people he did well in commencing this work.

The sheep gate, as connected with the thought of mercy, would doubtless suggest the exercise of pastoral care and the sustaining of the saints of God in priestly conditions.

Whatever there may be in any one of us that can be used in the way of recovery, we have to recognize the fact that the basis of recovery in the heart of any saint of God, or of any position, is the sovereignty of God's mercy.

It would appear that Eliashib gave a right lead when he builded the sheep gate; he sanctified it, and set up the doors of it; but unfortunately he seems to have forgotten the locks and the bars. Some have thought that it was right that the sheep gate should not have had locks and bars, but Eliashib was the man who later brought Tobiah into the inside place, a place where he should never have been.

These are points we need to see the force of, for these gates as suggesting centres of administration, needed to be preserved from the inroads of all which was destructive of the things of God. It says of Eliashib that he builded "even unto the tower", it does not say that he *built* the tower which would be protective in character.

There are only ten gates mentioned in this chapter, we have to look further into the book to find the other two. This may suggest the feature of *responsibility* as connected with the work.

Is there anything in the New Testament which would answer to the locks and bars?

In the Epistles we find many warnings, which if heeded would promote a preparedness to maintain the truth of God as we know it.

"Having your loins girt about with truth" (Eph. 6: 14) would be a practical exhortation in this regard. A wall suggests that something precious is enclosed. Let us value the heritage that we have come into, a wonderful heritage of the truth- let us be set to guard it. We need to be on the alert in regard to maintaining what we know to be due to the Lord Himself in our gatherings, seeking His constant help in doing so.

In a day of ruin we see what would answer to the locks and bars in the word to Timothy, "Be thou also on thy guard" (2 Tim. 5: 15 New Trans.).

"And next unto him builded the men of Jericho" (v. 2). That is a most encouraging feature; here were men connected with a city, the wall of which had been *brought down* by God, and now they are prepared to help in building a wall round the city of God itself. That is a wonderful thing. Would it not challenge each of us as to whether we have given more time and interest to the system of things that Satan has built up, rather than to the circle of divine interests into which God has brought us?

One of the features that come to light in this chapter is the unity that marks the different classes of those engaged in the work-"Men of Jericho", nobles, goldsmiths, perfumers and others. Would not this suggest that, although differing from one another in secular things, yet we should be unified in our desires and activities in divine interests?

Does the thought of the sovereignty of God in mercy apply to these men of Jericho?

I think so! The character of Saul of Tarsus is expressed in his own words, "I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did". He

was assured it was the right thing to do, and he used all his energy to destroy that Name. But when converted he was prepared to lay down his life for Christ's sake. It was the same man, but he says twice in his letter to Timothy, "Mercy was shewn me".

We have references to building and to repairing; is there a difference?

Yes! There is a suggestion in this chapter that part of the old wall had apparently stood; the reference to the Old Gate would perhaps indicate that everything was not destroyed; but that which had been destroyed was renewed.

Is not that confirmed by verse eight in the New Translation? "And they left Jerusalem in its state as far as the broad wall". The footnote suggests that the Chaldeans had left the wall as far as that.

The Fish Gate would perhaps have the out-going of the Gospel in mind, "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". The striking thing is that these locks and bars come in in relation to the Fish Gate. Peter was the apostle whose preaching resulted in a yield of 3,000 souls, and it is not without point that he was a fisherman. The Lord had said to Peter and Andrew, "I will make you fishers of men".

In verse 4 we read, "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". It is very interesting to note the number of times the "the son of" is referred to. Whether there had been failure in the fathers we do not know. They may have been very successful fathers for all we know, but "the son of" suggests that there is something committed to the interests of God in the following generation.

Do we see a somewhat similar thought in the word of Paul to his son Timothy, "Faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2: 2)?

From the divine standpoint each one may regard himself as being the son of some brother who served the Lord and is now home with Him. Paul said to Timothy "My own son in the faith"; but we may have to say with exercise of heart, "can reliance be put upon me as one of the "sons" in relation to divine interests today"?

The thought of sonship adds dignity to the service; in this dispensation we *are sons*, and however small and obscure our service may be, it should be done in the dignity of our calling, the dignity of sonship.

Would verse 5 be the contrast to what has just been said? There were some who "put not their necks to the work of their Lord". It may be that they thought their position as nobles lifted them above this kind of work; worldly position could be a very great danger to any one of us.

We do not want to stress unduly the meaning of these names, but there are important touches in relation to them, especially in regard to the thought of serving with dignity. Meremoth-elevation; Urijah-the light of Jehovah; Meshullam-devoted; Berechiah-blessed of Jehovah; Meshezabeel-freed by Jehovah. All these are in the fourth verse, and surely they set forth morally the position in which we are found today. We have been brought into a sphere of light and liberty and blessing; and with an appreciation in our hearts of the love that has brought us into the place of sons, our service should be marked by devotion of heart and mind to the Lord.

Could you throw any light on the fact that these Tekoites are spoken of as a company? Also in verse 27 we read that they "repaired another piece".

It is good when we can move together in an exercise; these men evidently did so, and having completed

one exercise successfully they are apparently quite happy to move together again on "another piece". They evidently regarded the work as *their* Lord's.

The word used is "Adon"-their Master; a divine Name. They did not regard the work as that of Nehemiah merely, it was the work of *their Lord*. If we view our service as being related only to certain brethren, we shall miss the mark; but if we labour in relation to God, and keep His interests as the object before us, we shall discover that we are labouring with others who have precisely the same exercises.

We could not class these Tekoites with their nobles, for the nobles "laid not their necks to the work" (verse 5).

Once we begin to think that we are socially important we shall miss the opportunity of helping in the things of God.

We have referred to the doors, the locks and the bars. When Noah went into the Ark, God shut the door; but in Isaiah, chapter 26, we read of a new song in the land. "We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. *Open ye* the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in". There are two sides to this matter, the preserving of what is right, and the keeping out of what is not; the righteous nation comes in. It looks on to the world to come and the display of the glory.

The Old Gate in verse 6 or, as it might read, the "Old Wall", we have already referred to. The portion which had not been destroyed by the enemy may be in mind. The names are significant; Jehoiada-the Lord knows; Meshullam-devoted; Besodeiah-in the secret of Jehovah. It is good to be in the secret of what God is doing for the glory of His own Name, whatever may be the activities of the enemy.

In verse 7 we have those who have the "throne of the governor" in view. How vitally important it is in a day of ruin to hold fast the thought of right administration. The Lord would encourage us in our day to maintain what is due to His Name, and to seek to be faithful to Him in all our movement. All true service has in mind the furtherance of the rights of the Lord in the affections of His people.

Why do we get the individual Gibeonite and then the men of Gibeon, in verse seven?

The name Melatiah means "One whom Jehovah sets free", so that whilst as

Gibeonites they were under a servile bondage, God evidently came in sovereignly, and as this man's name suggests, set them free that they might be available for the work. The Gibeonites were hewers of wood and drawers of water, and they had to be set free from that to be available for this important work.

We could perhaps turn to a chapter like the twelfth of first Corinthians, and note the variation of gift which includes "helps, governments", and we are assured that true assembly features will not be in evidence where government is not maintained.

What do we learn in relation to the goldsmiths and the apothecaries mentioned in verse eight?

We may suppose that these men were not used to handling a trowel; they were men of refined occupations. Perhaps the gold would be that which was indicative of the divine nature, what was of God; and the apothecary would speak of the fragrance of a service devoted to divine interests. Whatever may be suggested it is evident that they, too, felt the necessity for this wall to be built, and they desired to have their part in the building of the wall.

It is a blessed thing to bring into the service precious thoughts of the greatness and deity of Christ; and

alongside that the charm and sweetness of His Name. We need power for that; to speak of the greatness of Christ and maintain that which is due to His holy Name, and at the same time to be helped to charm each other with thoughts of His preciousness.

Doubtless these men had been working inside the city, perhaps on temple work, but if they were to go on rightly as goldsmiths and as apothecaries, they would feel the need of protection in the divine circle; hence the desire with them to have their part in the repairing of the wall.

The brother who is able to give us the most precious and most intimate thoughts of Christ and the truth that encircles Him, can also take his part in the defence of that truth. We see this exemplified in Paul. Who gives us sweeter touches of glory and intimacy than he does in his ministry? And who defended the truth more than Paul did?

We cannot cover all the details of this chapter, but there is an important word for us in verse 10. Jedaiah repaired "over against his house". Are there not many references in the New Testament which show the vital importance of the truth being stood for in the houses of the saints? After unfolding the precious truths as to the Person of Christ in the Colossian epistle, and then the truth of Christ and the church in the Ephesian epistle, the apostle in his exhortations to the saints refers expressly to conditions which should obtain in the houses of God's people. Do we not need grace and wisdom in order that our homes might be places where the precious interests of Christ are appreciated in holy separation from the world which denies His rights? We must have a sense of the sovereign rights of God if there is to be success in any work we may do.

Is there a suggestion in verse 11 that there were Gentiles working on the wall.?

It would seem that not only here but in other places also the sovereignty of God had made room for the Gentiles in relation to His interests. In 2 Samuel 8, David, after subduing the nations, brought in the dedicated things "of Syria, and of Moab", etc. Again, we have the devotion to the Ark of God of such men as Uriah the Hittite and Obed-Edom the Gittite. All this would magnify the mercy of God. We might also refer to Ruth being brought into the genealogy of David the king of Israel.

Would it not also be indicative of *our* place as Gentiles? We have our part in the things of God on the basis of sovereign mercy.

There was only one man named in relation to the building of Solomon's temple, Hiram; he was a Gentile. Indeed Zechariah says "They that are *far off* shall come and build in the temple of the LORD".

Then we have the Valley Gate. We may be more interested in the Gate of the Fountain, but the Valley Gate has its place. It would seem from verse 13 that there is some link between the Valley Gate and the Dung Gate. The Valley Gate (and also the Dung Gate) is mentioned in relation to Nehemiah's activities in Nehemiah 2. It probably refers to the Valley of Hinnom, the place where the bodies of the criminals and the refuse were burned; so that it would appear to be definitely linked with the Dung Gate.

Paul uses this word "dung" in the epistle to the Philippians in connection with the repudiation of all standing and trust in the flesh. I have been arrested by the epistle to the Galatians of late. Paul speaks to the Galatian saints more severely than he does to the Corinthians. Judaism, in Paul's estimation, was the worst thing that could ever invade the Assembly of God, and it is a principle that the saints of God are in danger of cultivating today. In this way we may suggest that Paul insisted upon the necessity of the Dung Gate.

Perhaps there is no other epistle where the truth of the cross of Christ as the end of the first man is so clearly seen as in the epistle to the Galatians. We are slow to learn this lesson. We may prefer to live

next door to a Galatian than to a Corinthian, but from the standpoint of the truth of God and the danger of corrupting it, Paul was very much alive to the reprobate character of Judaism as destroying the features of Christianity.

We read "Moreover Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at the Corner Gate, and at the Valley Gate, and at the turning of the wall, and fortified them". 2 Chronicles 26: 9. Recalling what has been said concerning the association of the Valley Gate and the Dung Gate, it would appear that this is a feature of the truth in which we need to be strengthened, the casting out as dung all that has been judged in the cross of Christ.

Job would have arrived at the truth of the Dung Gate and the Valley Gate, when he said "I abhor myself" (Job 42: 6). Paul, too, accounted as dung all that he had before boasted in (Phil. 3: 8).

Would the Gate of the Fountain (verse 15) be indicative of the Spirit of God? "But the Gate of the Fountain repaired Shallun the son of Col-Hozeh, the ruler of part of Mizpah".

Yes! I thought the Fountain Gate would suggest the thought of the Spirit.

Why for the first time do we get in verse 15 concerning one of the gates, the added expression "and covered it"?

The only thought I have is that the covering would preserve it from defilement.

There are things which are not known in the world, things which we enjoy in the intimacy of the Sanctuary of God, and the choice communications of the Spirit are on that line.

Do we not also read "Whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him" (Matt. 12: 32)? He was to be guarded in that way. Thus whilst appreciating the refreshing character of the communications of the Holy Spirit of God, we need to be preserved in our estimation of their holy features too.

### **Nehemiah 3: 16-32.**

It is of interest to notice that in verse 16 we have mention of the "mighty"-an alternative rendering is "Mighty men"; in verse 17 we have the *Levites*; in verse 18 "*their brethren*"; in verse 22 the *priests*; and in verse 26 we have the *Nethinims*. These different persons may speak of various elements raised up by the Lord in the local gatherings in order that they might function for His pleasure. This word "mighty men" is that used to describe the warriors, the leaders in the battle, and perhaps they would suggest the features of the evangelist going out with the glad tidings into the enemies' territory, seeking to bring souls into subjection to Christ; potential material for the divine circle to which, through grace, we belong.

Is there an illusion to David's mighty men in this?

There may be! They were of the warrior character, although perhaps not always on the evangelical side, yet they were men who were set to defend the interests of God.

The *house* of the mighty men would suggest that a permanent place was found for them in the local setting. When the midwives in Egypt acted in a way that pleased God, He made for them houses, indicating that He would have that feature maintained.

Is it not your thought that this feature of the mighty men should be retained in every local Assembly?

Yes! It would be well for us to really get hold of that thought.

Do you think there should be mighty men in every local gathering?

Unfortunately in this day of breakdown there are abnormalities, and often we feel the need of certain elements that are deficient; but speaking of what is normal, there should be *mighty men* in every gathering, whether in relation to the preaching of the gospel or in the defence of the truth. At Antioch, which appears to have been a normal assembly, we have two mighty men mentioned, Barnabas and Saul.

These mighty men are not mentioned in this verse as actually building; it seems to suggest that their house was a point to be reached. Perhaps it would link with the Philippian epistle, where we see a great servant carrying on the work of the gospel, and others who had the same exercise and laboured with him.

In the order in which these men are given—the mighty, then the Levites, and the brethren, and finally the priests—there would appear to be moral progress in relation to divine interests.

In our previous readings we have observed that these men are not working independently one of another. One cause of division amongst the brethren has been the attempt to part asunder the exercise of gift, whereas these mighty men are alongside the Levites, who are seen working with their brethren, and with the priests and the Nethinims. Independency in the things of God is really self-will.

*Individual* service would be entirely different from *independent* service. An individual must move in relation to his own Master, but he would surely ask, as the apostle did, "Brethren, pray for us".

We each need to have an individual exercise as to service, and that would be why these various features are named, but as moving before the Lord and in fellowship with one's brethren and not independently of them, there would be definite help given. If we can see the outstanding difference between what is individual and what is independent we shall be helped. *They builded together*.

Why is the word *repair* mentioned so many times?

Evidently everything had not been destroyed, and applying the thought to our day, we know that about 140 years ago men of God were raised up to bring to light again truths that had long been forgotten. All truths had not been forgotten, but much needed *repairing*, that is, setting in its right place in the hearts of God's people in accordance with the Scriptures. Take for instance the great truth that Luther stood for, *justification by faith*; that had not been entirely destroyed, but it needed to be stood for in faithfulness. Later in church history other truths had apparently been completely overlooked, such as the truth of the one body and of the Lord's coming. These truths were brought in, so to speak, afresh; but such truths as justification by faith were put in their right settings.

In verse 17 we read "after him repaired the Levites". Their service would have to do with the general service and ministry of the truth, instruction for the saints; a service that we may thank God is ceaselessly carried on in the gatherings of the saints. In Deuteronomy 33 we read that the particular work committed to the Levites was, "They shall teach Jacob Thy judgments, and Israel Thy law". In 2 Peter 1, we read "And add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge". Virtue would suggest moral courage, a preparedness to stand for the truth, and it is well to know what we stand for, hence the necessity for the service of the Levites.

Is there the danger of regarding Levitical work as of less importance than it really is?

An element of weakness is introduced if brethren attempt to take up service of a priestly character in what we speak of as the "morning meeting", and yet fail to avail themselves of Levitical instruction.

To be practical, are you referring to the disparity between attendance on a Lord's Day morning and at the reading meeting?

Exactly! Many are defective in regard to teaching. We all need to come more under divine instruction in order that the service of God might be carried on according to the truth that has been given to us in the Scriptures, and not according to our own thoughts. This disparity between Lord's Day morning meeting attendance and week night attendance is something that really should be taken to heart by all.

That leads to another feature which is seen in verse 18, "And after him repaired their brethren". This would confirm what has been previously guarded against, that while individual exercise is needed and is of great importance, yet we are set *together*. It is good to see this feature coming in immediately after reference has been made to the Levites, the feature of brethren evidently moving together.

There seems to be a special feature in verse 20 which we do well to observe; It reads "After him Baruch the son of Zabbai earnestly repaired the other piece". Apparently he is the only man of whom that is said in the chapter. Looking at Baruch as he laboured, no one would have the slightest doubt as to what he was doing; and what is more, his earnestness was apparent, and has been recorded by the Spirit of God.

It links with what was said earlier, Zabbai's name means "purity". It is when our motives are pure that we are earnest in the things of God. If we have mixed or impure motives, we shall be dilatory; but purity of motive which has only the Lord's honour in view, will give us vitality in the work.

We might notice that this man's work was at a most important point of the wall-the corner of the high priest's house. The enemy would have been delighted to get in at such a point.

We have remarked that Baruch's father's name means "purity"; his own name means "blessed". What a privilege and responsibility rests upon Christian parents to hold the things of God in such purity, that the children might be brought into the conscious blessedness of them. That would definitely link with verse 23, where we have the expressions, "their house", and "his house".

The next to be mentioned are the priests, who would set forth another feature in relation to those who were engaged in the work.

It is important to realize that whatever service is carried on in the energy of the Holy Spirit, all is in view of promoting priestly conditions amongst the saints of God.

No one would have such an appreciation of the death of Jesus as the priests would have; the more priestly one is, the more one's affections would be softened and one's spirit subdued by the thought of the death of Christ. The reference to "men of the plain (of Jordan)" (New Trans.) may bear that application. In New Testament language it may suggest those who move sympathetically with the truth of the Lord's death, and who have an intelligent appreciation of what that death has established for the glory and praise of God.

Would there not be a necessary period of exercise before one could move in reality along the lines these various features represent?

We have remarked earlier that there appears to be a moral progression in these things, from the warriors to the Levites; from the Levites to the brethren; from the brethren to the priests. None of us learn these things quickly, but if we seek grace to go on, and if we do go on *earnestly*, we shall then be established in the truth and enter more fully into its privileges.

The "corner" is mentioned several times in the chapter. What is its significance?

In the construction of the tabernacle a double board was placed at the corners, just where it was liable to fall apart; and I think we know from experience that sometimes things come in amongst us, which if we are not careful could immediately divide us; and we need, as it were, extra stability and extra wisdom on such occasions.

One of the most acute angles that ever arose is seen in Acts 15; a matter which could have split the church from end to end on the question of Judaism. The brethren looked into it, and the "corner" was strengthened in a spirit of no compromise and yet of affection, and all was supported by Scriptural principles.

We see another difficulty as early as the 6th chapter of the book of the Acts; the outcry by the Hellenists against the Hebrews over the daily ministrations. It needed careful handling, but the brethren handled it well, and the position was saved.

In verse 26 we have the Nethinims. These servants apparently came to light only in the days of the erection of the temple; they seem to have been a provision made by David, and do not appear to have had a place in the tabernacle system; but they were found in the temple. Their function was altogether to serve the Levites; they laboured for the Levites.

In Ezra 8: 20 we read, "Also of the Nethinims, whom David and the princes had appointed for the service of the Levites". In our day they would perhaps answer to those who do many services behind the scenes, as we may speak. Many things which are necessary, and have to be done week by week; things which may often be taken for granted, but someone has *to do them*.

What is there that is common to all these various classes that we have been considering? The mighty men, the Levites, the priests and the Nethinims; what simple thing is there common to them all?

Perhaps the answer to that would be *devotion*. True devotion to the work and interests of the Lord would surely bind the saints together.

What is the difference between "the King's Garden" in verse 15 and "the King's House" in verse 25?

"The King's Garden" would be that in which he walks in order to gather his fruits; the perfume and fruits of the garden are for the delight of his own heart. "The House" would speak of the place of intimacy, a place he shares with the one upon whom his affections are set. Both thoughts are seen in what the Church is to Christ.

What is the thought in the Nethinims dwelling at Ophel?

According to the marginal reading it could be "tower", and it is "over against the Water Gate".

The Water Gate would suggest a ministrations of refreshment to the saints of God; and that is the result of the Nethinims supporting the Levites. Water seen in movement, as in the fountain, is generally indicative of the Spirit; water in its cleansing and refreshing capacity is usually indicative of the Word of God. As seen here its relation to the *gate* would suggest that there is power for the administration of the truth.

It says the Nethinims *dwelt* there. These exercises are to engage us constantly, are they not?

Indeed they are! It is remarkable that it was the *Nethinims* who were there as maintaining the source of refreshment for the people of God. That should encourage all those who may not be able to take on any prominent service. Many a simple service can be used to set the affections of the saints in liberty, and thus enrich the service of God.

In verse 28 we read "From above the Horse Gate (remark: another indication of power) repaired the

priests, every one over against his house". If priestly service is to be maintained in power, how essential it is for each to see that things are right according to the truth in "his house". So we again read in verse 29, "After them repaired Zadok the son of Immer over against his house".

Another feature comes to light at the end of verse 30, "After him repaired Meshullam the son of Berechiah over against *his chamber*". Apparently this man didn't own the whole of the house; it would appear as though he had one room only in the house; or, as the footnote in the New Translation suggests, "a lodging".

It would be an encouragement to people who are not heads of houses, and have not a house of their own. If we have but one room, we can hold that for the Lord. There would be nothing in that room which is contrary to His Name. In that way the work of the Lord would be supported.

The last name mentioned, Malchiah, means "God is king", which would suggest the end in view. The rights of God amongst His people secured.

There are two gates that have not yet been commented upon, the "East Gate" (v. 29) and the "Gate of Miphkad" (v. 31).

The "East Gate" is actually the gate through which the glory of the Lord will return to Jerusalem, according to Ezekiel; it is the gate that looks towards the rising of the sun and Ezekiel 43 and 44, speaks of the glory coming in by way of the East Gate. The keeper of the East Gate is Shechaniah, whose name suggests "continual dwelling", or alternatively, "The dwelling of Jehovah". It would perhaps indicate the sustaining of a company who would be continually on the watch for the return of the glory.

Throughout the centuries, including what is spoken of as the dark ages, there have been loyal hearts beating in anticipation of the moment when the glory will return. We, too, are looking for the Lord's coming. Doubtless there have always been hearts that in the breaking of bread have had His coming again in view, waiting for the moment when the glory will return.

Lastly, we have the "Gate of Miphkad", which means "The appointed place". It may also be rendered "muster".

That is the last of the ten gates mentioned here-the appointed place. It might suggest that the East Gate having come into view, with the looking for His return, the people have reached their appointed place, and the chapter ends on that note.

Two other gates are mentioned later, in Nehemiah 8: 16, "the Gate of Ephraim"; and in Nehemiah 12: 39, "the Prison Gate"; in this verse the Gate of Ephraim is mentioned again. That completes the twelve, but it is a happy thought, as we have said, that the last gate in Nehemiah 3 shows that the work is complete, they have reached this grand objective-"the appointed place". There is a very simple statement about Abraham setting out from Ur of the Chaldees with Sarah his wife. It says "And into the land of Canaan they came" (Gen. 12: 5). He might have set out, and yet not have completed the journey; but "into the land of Canaan they came". Let us be encouraged not only to have an objective, but to seek grace that the objective might be reached.

## **Nehemiah 8: 1-12.**

The beginning of chapter 8 connects with the last verse of the previous chapter, "When the seventh month came, the children of Israel were in their cities. And all the people gathered themselves 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". Now that the city was built, and the temple service was proceeding, there was evidently the desire to regulate everything according to the will of God. It is this matter of being regulated by the Word of God which we desire to stress.

"All the people", is an oft repeated expression; is there any specific importance in it for us?

There were certain ones specially named, as Ezra the scribe, the priest (he is referred to in each of these ways in this chapter); there was also the Tirshatha, Nehemiah; but the point is that they "gathered themselves together as one man", unity marks them as a company. I suppose there is a similarity to the second chapter of Acts, where we see a movement of God Himself, and believers moving together in accordance with it. In that chapter they are "all with one accord in one place", and in Nehemiah 8 they are gathered together "as one man" to be instructed in the Word of God.

It was necessary for the people to be adjusted in regard to the divine centre before they could really appreciate divine teaching. That is a very challenging matter for us today; unless we have the thought of *God* in connection with His interests on the earth before us, we shall not be freed from *man's* thoughts concerning those interests. As regulated in our affections in regard to God's own interests here, we shall value divine instruction.

That is an important point to press; if we are wandering about in the avenues that have been established and maintained by the will of man, we shall never appreciate God's thoughts as expressed in Christ. We must have an appreciation of the divine centre.

What is the divine centre today?

Well! it is not a geographical matter, nor a question of a meeting room; but it is where God is moving in the power of the Spirit in relation to the glory of Christ. If we find those who are subject to the movements of the Spirit of God in regard to the glory of Christ, and are appreciating the truth as it is in that blessed Man, we shall see the moral features of God's centre. It is a sphere where the working of the mind of man is excluded.

Does it not involve the recognition in a practical way of the Lordship and Headship of Christ?

Exactly! "Let every one who names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity" (2 Tim. 2: 19 New Trans.). Iniquity in that connection is the intrusion of the mind of man into the things of God. If there is with us the recognition of the Lordship and the Headship of Christ, we shall be holding things in definite relationship to Himself, In that way we shall reach the divine centre.

We see in the early verses of our chapter that a way is prepared for the opening up of the Word of God, in order to bring divine instruction before the people, and it can now be worked out by them in the very place in which God gave it and in reference to both the temple and the city. That is the end in view.

Truth can never be worked out unless there is the recognition of the rights of Christ. Although Ezra is mentioned here as the priest, thus introducing the element of grace, yet at the same time we see that he is stressing the law and the commandments of Jehovah. In the epistle to the Corinthians, where we have an assembly functioning in a locality, Paul says "If any man think himself to be . . . spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord". It is the Lord's commandment that regulates the functioning of any assembly in a locality.

How then can we determine when we have arrived at the truth of this so that it can be worked out amongst us?

There is not much difficulty with any honest affection as to knowing whether desires are according to

God or not. In our hearts we know when we are really desirous of knowing the mind of the Lord. We may fail to carry it out fully; we may be very weak in our practical expression of it, but the heart knows when it is really set for what is due to the name of the Lord.

In other words that soul would be teachable?

Exactly! That would be the proof of sincerity; and you would find yourself in a circle where teaching was available.

It has been said in the reading that this recovery was partial, but I think we need to guard the fact that it was partial only as regards numbers; the features of the recovery were according to the mind of God. Whilst we are not able to walk with all the saints of God in any one place let us be thankful for those who as "one man" desire to be found together where the Lord would have them to be, and who are amenable to the teaching of Scripture.

As we go through this chapter we see that which was originally established being answered to. In Leviticus 23 the last three feasts are all in connection with the seventh month, and all stand in relation to Israel. The first one on the first day of the month was the feast of trumpets, and that is answered to in the people gathering themselves together; then we have the feast of atonement, and the answer to that is seen in the people weeping (v. 9); the last one on the fifteenth day was the feast of tabernacles, and this is reached at the end of the chapter where they are rejoicing before God. The recovery is thus seen to be in accord with divine instruction.

Referring to what was originally established, there is no reason at all why we cannot, in our day, "continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread, and in prayers". That is what marked the early days of the church, and all these features are available for us today.

*Days* appear to have an important place in the chapter. Doubtless because they were feast days, that is, they stood out as holy convocations to the Lord Himself. Should we not hold each day in relation to divine interest? The Lord's Day would, of course, have a special place as we gather for the breaking of bread; but there are other occasions for prayer, for the reading of the Scriptures, and for ministry of the Word; all these should have a controlling place in our lives.

What is the significance of the word being read in "the open place" (v. 2 New Trans.)?

It is "the open place that was before the Water Gate". In the Water Gate we have the thought of the ministry of the Word of God in its refreshing character, and there is in "the open place" a suggestion of having liberty of movement as in subjection to it.

Would you say something about "all that could hear with understanding" (v. 2)?

Every saint of God, as having believed the gospel, is sealed with the Holy Spirit; but although we have the Spirit we can be hindered from the understanding of the Word of God if we are lending our ears to what Scripture calls "fables". Whereas, if we are moving in the circle of truth there is developed with us an ability to understand the truth. We have already seen that the truth stands related to the divine centre, and that is where we are instructed.

"Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things"; is that the way of understanding?

The Holy Spirit of God with all the refreshing ministry from an ascended Man in glory is in us; do we give Him His rightful place that He might guide us into all the truth? A good many questions that are asked would never arise in persons' minds if they had recourse to the resources of the Water Gate.

Could you say who those "that could hear with understanding" would include? Would they include the young?

That may be so, but there were probably some that could not understand the language, there was a mixed company. Obviously there were those in the company who perfectly understood what was being said. It does say that "the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law". That is an important word for us all; ministry may be given and we may listen to it in a very careless way. You will remember that the Lord said, "Be careful *what* ye hear". We may think we can read anything we like, or listen to anything we like, and not be adversely affected by it; but we shall find that if we are listening to worldly things, we shall not have a ready ear for the Word of God. The Lord also said "Be careful *how* ye hear". It becomes us to listen with attentive ears because it is the Word of God.

In Luke 10, it says in the New Translation that Mary "having sat down at the feet of Jesus, was listening to His Word"; she was attentive. What these men read was the law of Moses, which would engage their minds with God's original word to His people. We need to emphasize these points; we are sometimes said to be old-fashioned, and that we should move with the times; but the Word of God is not only abreast of, it is ahead of the times. This would preserve us from any idea of fresh light, which is a thing to be guarded against.

This reading and the attention given to it lasted about six hours. That is a long time to stand. How many of us spend six hours reading the Bible in one day and then the next day are anxious for more? Of course it is not always possible to read for six hours on end; but the point is that these people had the time and they *utilised* it.

It must have been a great exercise for those who stood and listened all that time. The book of the law had been neglected for many years, but now they came back to it with freshness.

Although Ezra is named here several times it says, "and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law". It was the *commandment of God* that had its effect upon the people; the servant was used but their thoughts were directed to the law itself.

In this reading we notice that there was instruction also. In Nehemiah 9: 3 we read, "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". The word was having a practical effect upon them.

In verse 8 we read, "So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading". It is a very serious matter if the Word of God is read and a wrong impression given from it; all true ministry enhances the value of the Scriptures in the ears of those who listen.

There are two important things for us to notice in verses 5 and 6; all the people stood up-there was reverence; and "Ezra blessed the LORD", that would indicate a sense of thankfulness.

We see that before there was any regulation of the people through the Word, it was God Himself who came before their souls. It is a grand start to the understanding of divine truth if God has His rightful place in our affections.

Why do you get the remarkable expression here, "the great God"? "And Ezra blessed Jehovah the LORD, the great God".

It may be in contrast to the gods the people had known in Babylon and probably in Persia; Jehovah is to be supreme in their thoughts-"the great God". In Psalm 96 we read, "He is to be feared above all gods.

For all the gods of the nations are idols".

"Idols" as used in that verse is a very remarkable word, it really means "nonentities"; and what is stressed in our chapter is the greatness of God Himself.

It is noticeable that before Ezra commences to read, God in His greatness comes before the people and immediately they say, "Amen, Amen . . . and they bowed their heads, and worshipped".

What is the present day application of the "lifting up of their hands"?

Paul uses the term in 1 Timothy 2: 8, "Lifting up holy hands". As coming into the presence of God we are conscious that we are speaking to Him and that He is listening to us. When we bless God we offer something to Him, our hands are filled with the excellence of Christ.

It is important to see that the Tirshatha is mentioned first in verse 9, "Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people".

Why does Nehemiah come before the priests?

One well-known verse in the gospel of John explains that. In John 13 the Lord says to His disciples, "Ye call Me the Teacher and the Lord, and ye say well for I am so. If I therefore, the Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet . . ." ( New Trans.) You will notice that the Lord reverses the words. We do not get the gain of the Lord as Teacher unless we recognize His Lordship. The Lord again said, "If any man will do His will he shall know of the doctrine" (John 7: 17). Hence we have the governor first. Slowness in accepting divine teaching can often be traced to our not bowing to the Lord's authority.

The word which follows is, "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". Weeping preceded the rejoicing, and doubtless the people were in a right state when they wept before the Lord.

It was the word of the *law* coming through the *priest* that affected the people. It came to them "Not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God" (1 Thessalonians 2: 13).

The teaching of the law of God had had its rightful effect upon the people, and the people's attitude of weeping was the proof that recovery had been effected. "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". May we just say very simply that it is as we enjoy in *fellowship together* the richness of the divine circle, that we have that which can be used in blessing to others.

Does eating the fat and drinking the sweet suggest discernment?

It would be the enjoyment of the very best that the divine circle affords. It is remarkable that the fat is included, because in the sacrifices the fat was reserved for God. Nevertheless we do read in Psalm 36, "They shall be abundantly satisfied with the *fatness* of Thy house; and Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures".

It is to be noted that this was to continue after the meeting was over. It says in verse 12, "And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions". This enjoyment was not confined to the occasion of listening to the word, but was the *practical result* of that instruction; and as *we go our ways* we ought to be in the practical enjoyment of the things with which we have been occupied in these meetings.

The word in verse 12 is "great rejoicing" (New Trans.).

The end of the section already referred to in John 13, reads, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye

do them" (v. 17). They were in the good of the teaching and hence there was great rejoicing. They were happy and rejoicing because not only had they heard the word but had understood it. May it be so increasingly with each one of us.

## **Nehemiah 8: 13-18 and Leviticus 23: 39-44.**

In Leviticus we have the institution of the feast of tabernacles, and in Nehemiah 8, we have the last recorded celebration of this feast in Old Testament history. It is not the last mention of the feast, it is mentioned in the last chapter of Zechariah, but historically that preceded Nehemiah.

In this last celebration of the feast of tabernacles we see the fruit of this day of recovery, not only in the restoration of the city, but also in the restoration of that which ministers delight to the heart of God. "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". The exercise had strengthened, and we see others who were as desirous as Nehemiah was of restoring what was due to God. The leaders of the people, whom God had apparently gifted and officially set up to lead the people, appear to have arrived at a spiritual state in which they could answer to the mind of God.

Why are "the chief of the fathers" mentioned here, and actually mentioned first?

The fathers would perhaps suggest the thought of what is local, whereas the priests and the Levites would be more on the line of gifts as seen in Ephesians, Romans and Corinthians.

Do you regard the chief of the fathers as being distinct from the priests and the Levites?

The chief of the fathers would seem to indicate those who carry the responsibility of the local meeting. There are gifts to the assembly that cannot be confined to one locality, but it is good to see those whom "the chief of the fathers" represent working harmoniously alongside those of whom the priests and the Levites and Ezra the scribe would speak. Thus there would be a united exercise in regard to the things of God for His pleasure and for the blessing of His people.

That which is represented by the priests and the Levites would find better ground in the local meeting to work on if the features of the "chief of the fathers" were present in power. The successful functioning of what we may speak of as official, depends very largely upon the presence of what is moral.

In the New Translation verse 8 reads that they "were gathered together . . . to gain wisdom as to the words of the law". There is not only the reading of the word and the giving of the sense as we read in verse 8, but wisdom is needed in the application of these things. Here were men who not only desired to hear what the word actually said, but they sought also the wisdom needed to translate it into right action.

We may not always find in the word exact details in relation to everything that may arise, but leading principles are given to us, and we need wisdom in order that we may be governed by these principles and thus be found moving in line with the mind of the Lord.

It is noticeable that when these leaders arrived at the mind of God as written in the words of the law, all the people unanimously answered to it.

Is it not important to see that those who were leading in the exercise, "the chief of the fathers of all the people, the priests, and the Levites", all recognized that they needed to gain wisdom? It seems that the privilege of dwelling in booths had been lost sight of, and instruction as to the truth was available to

those who sought it. Light as to this was given in Leviticus 23, but what was need was wisdom from God to apply that light to existing conditions. We also need wisdom from God to enable us to rightly apply the truth to the circumstances in which we find ourselves today.

In Ephesians 1: 17, Paul prays "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him". If we had the spirit of wisdom, that is the ability to understand and apply the truth, without the revelation of the truth itself, it would be valueless. On the other hand if we had the revelation without the wisdom to apply it, it would be equally valueless; but both the revelation and the wisdom to apply it are available to us in the goodness of our God.

That is exactly what we see in our chapter; this was not fresh light given to them, the light *was there*; what they needed was wisdom to apply the light to their present circumstances.

Paul wrote to Timothy, "consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things (2 Timothy 2: 7).

It would seem that this gaining of wisdom was a constant thing; at the end of the chapter we read, "also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God".

What they found was that "which the LORD had commanded by *Moses*" (v. 14). It was not by Ezra or by Nehemiah; He commanded by *Moses*, "that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month".

Although they had been carried into captivity, we find in this day of recovery features, doubtless maintained by God, which express themselves in a desire for the truth.

Why in Leviticus 23 are the people instructed to hold the feast at the end of the agricultural year?

The blessing of the corn and of the wine is first mentioned in Genesis 27, when Isaac blessed Jacob, but it is not until Deuteronomy 7 that we get the corn, and the wine, and the oil (v. 13). That order appears to be maintained throughout the Old Testament right on to Hosea, where we read "the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine and the oil" (Hosea 2: 22). The reason for this order is clear; the corn is the result of the harvest; the wine is the result of the vintage; and last of all comes the oil. In the dispensational ways of God there will be a "harvest judgment", a judgment between good and evil, followed by the "vintage"-the removal of every opposing element; eventuating in the outpouring of the Spirit of God, so that the blessing of God will be enjoyed in the power of the Spirit in the world to come. That is what we see typified in the feast of tabernacles.

One of the most remarkable things about this feast is the introduction of the "booths". It is as though God would impress the people with the fact that when He brought them out from Egypt, here was the end to which He had it in mind to bring them, and here they have reached it.

We need in our day to remember that we have been delivered from all that Egypt represents and we are to have it in mind that God has not only called us out, but this is (typically) the grand climax that God has in view, and we may thank Him that we reach it today in the power of the Spirit, of which the oil speaks.

When God brought the people out of Egypt, He had no thought that they should "dwell" in the wilderness. He had the inheritance of the land in view and here, in the meanwhile, we see them "dwelling" in booths, in the enjoyment of the corn, and the wine and the oil. Looking at this feast and the gladness associated with it, we can anticipate the end which is our portion, and we can rejoice in God as the greatness of His thoughts enters our hearts.

Why is it that a curse will rest upon Egypt and the nations if they do not come up to the feast of tabernacles (see Zechariah 14: 19)?

God will not only bring His people, whom He delivered out of Egypt, into the full realization of the blessing of that day, but He will make the nations to realize why He took this nation up, and what He had in view in so doing.

We have the booths in Nehemiah but no sacrifices; in Ezra we have the sacrifices and the booths. Why is that?

We need to learn from these omissions. In Leviticus 23 we get both thoughts; the foundation of the matter in sacrifice, and the subsequent increase in joy and gladness. Perhaps we are so occupied with the foundation, as to hardly touch the spiritual results. We cannot, of course, think too highly of the foundation, but we need also to move on in our affections to what was in the mind of God to effect, through the sacrifice. God would not only remind us of the foundation, but He would have us enjoy the effect. As appreciating the value of the sacrifice let us seek grace to go on to the full purpose of God.

This is the last time the feast of tabernacles is celebrated in the Old Testament. Our feast is the *Lord's Supper*, and it is good to see brethren, under exercise, understanding a little as to *why* Christ died, and what His death has brought to light, and consequently being able to respond to God in intelligent praise and worship.

In verse 15 we read of the various branches that were to be brought; "Olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees". The trees from which these branches were obtained all grew in the land; the only tree that flourished in the wilderness was the acacia, or shittim wood tree, probably a shrub. This was the only tree that could stand wilderness conditions indicative, as we know, of Christ as the only Man Who endured wilderness conditions without failure.

In the New Translation "pine branches" are given as "wild olive branches". Why does the "wild olive" come in, in addition to the olive tree?

Would the thought of the "wild olive" connect with the end of Zechariah 14, suggesting the thought of the Gentile being brought in?

Yes, it may be that!

The wild olive is mentioned in Romans 11, but there the nations are in reconciliation provisionally, in view of the time when God will turn once more to His earthly people. Gentiles will, of course, be brought into blessing in the world-to-come.

In the mercy of God there will be, even from the nations, that which is for His glory.

Then we read in verse 16, "So the people went forth, and brought them, and made themselves booths. It does not say the "chiefs of the fathers and the priests and the Levites", but the *people* "made *themselves* booths".

What are we to learn in regard to the different places in which they build these booths (verse 16)?

It is significant that the roof of the house is first mentioned. That would perhaps indicate the thought of public testimony.

As it was the responsibility of each householder to see that the booths were made on his roof and in his court, so it would appear to have been the responsibility of the priests to make the booths in the courts of the house of God.

The whole household was apparently to dwell in its own booths on the top of its own house; this, as already mentioned, would speak of public testimony, but their movements in "their courts" were to be in accord; the booths were to be there also. Then, too, the movements in the "street" were to bear the same features. Thus the subjective result of the truth would be seen in the activities of the people of God.

Why does it say "the street of the Water Gate, and in the street of the gate of Ephraim"? Why is this Gate mentioned here?

It may be that this gate is reserved for this moment because Ephraim speaks of "double fruitfulness", and the effect of this movement of recovery is being manifested; hence this gate is not mentioned until that objective is reached.

The last gate to be mentioned is the Prison Gate, Nehemiah 12: 39. Perhaps the moral lesson for us is that we either, in true exercise, reach the Gate of Ephraim with its suggestion of fruitfulness, or we reach the restriction of the Prison Gate.

This would not be the kind of prison that Paul was in; in the prison Paul was really at the Gate of Ephraim. Wonderful truth came from the pen of Paul in prison. He was not there as under the discipline of the Lord, he was there for the truth of the mystery; "the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles" (Eph. 3: 1).

Then in verse 17 we read, "And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths and sat under the booth". The leaders are seen in verse 13, and now we find the people are moving with them; they made the booths and they sat under the booths. Sitting under them would shew their appreciation of the feature of pilgrim character, which God had in mind when He called their fathers out of Egypt with the inheritance in view.

Is not John 7 an important chapter in relation to the Feast of Tabernacles?

Verse 18 would point on to that! But is it not sad that it had to be recorded that from the days of Joshua they had never celebrated this feast?

Would there be any connection between the "last day" in John 7 and what we read in John 20: 26, "and after eight days again the disciples were within"?

The seventh day speaks of the end of a process whereas the eighth day is a new beginning. The point is that *Israel* will not reach what is true of the eighth day until they are actually established in the truth of the seventh. *We* touch the eighth day as the blessed God forms eternal things in our souls. *Israel* will not know these things until they are established in and formed by the truth of the New Covenant. Eternal things are available to us *now* in the power of the Spirit of God.

Will it be in the world-to-come that *Israel* will really take up Thomas's word and say, "My Lord and my God". and will that bring them to the features of what is eternal?

The foundation of it is seen in the expression "shall a nation be born at once?" (Isa. 66: 8). There is something *entirely new*, as we see in Ezekiel 36 and 37; involving, too, the gift of the Spirit. The Lord said to Nicodemus, "Art thou a master of *Israel*, and knowest not these things?" *Israel* is to experience new birth (we use the term new birth, it really is that as born of God) which will prepare them for the New Covenant, and it is from that moment that they will be subjectively capable not only of understanding the features of the world-to-come, but during the kingdom period of receiving light as to eternal things.

We are learning *now*; they will not be able to learn anything until they are born of God. It appears that the first thing that will mark them as born of God is that they will go out with the testimony of the Messiah; that will take them back to the Old Testament and they will not have the New in mind until Christ actually appears.

All that is pre-figured in the end of Nehemiah 8. It is not so much the *foundation* of the feast, but the wonderful end that is yet to be realized. They had no knowledge of this end in their day, but we, through the Spirit, can appreciate its features now. We are born of God and stand in relation to Christ in glory; we have the revelation of the world-to-come and the revelation of our eternal place in the new heavens.

The end of the chapter speaks of "very great gladness". Does that indicate that in all this there was something for God?

"Very great gladness" is something that cannot be improved upon, and it is beautiful to see that that is God's thought for man, He would fill his heart with joy and gladness.

There is another feature in the last verse which is of importance. "Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God". These men were gaining in wisdom; they not only discovered from Leviticus 23 that they should hold this feast, but they saw from Deuteronomy 31 that the law was to be read during it. "Moses wrote this law, and delivered it unto the priests the sons of Levi, which bare the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, and unto all the elders of Israel. And Moses commanded them, saying, At the end of every seven years, in the solemnity of the year of release, in the feast of Tabernacles, when all Israel is come to appear before the LORD thy God in the place which He shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing" (vv. 9-11) They have reached a very high note in the end of Nehemiah 8, but *they still need the law of the Lord*. Is not this a word for us today. Let us not think, however great our privileges and our enjoyment of them, that we ever reach a point in which we do not still need instruction in the things of God. Indeed in the enjoyment of privilege we should be better able to receive divine instruction than at any other moment.

Finally we read "And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly (a word which means *restraint*) according unto the manner". It is remarkable that the thought of restraint is brought in at this moment. There is nothing more wholesome for us as we increase in the knowledge of God and in the light of the glory of Christ, than to be brought to a sense of self-judgment, lest anything fleshly or natural should intrude itself into this wonderful sphere where everything is of the Spirit and everything is of Christ. Perhaps what is needed amongst us more than all else is this thought of balance in relation to the truth.

In Ephesians 2, we have the very height of Christian blessing, and in the beginning of Ephesians 4 we are exhorted to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering". The great apostle Paul in contemplation of the mercy of God says of himself that he is the chief of sinners, in contemplation of the grace of God in regard to gift he says, "I . . . am not meet to be called an apostle"; but in the light of the truth of the mystery he says that he is "less than the least of all saints".

In the enjoyment of the wonderful privileges which are ours in this day of recovered truth, let us cultivate low thoughts of self, and seek in all our movements the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.