

NEHEMIAH'S CONSECRATION AND PRAYER.

NOV. 5. – NEH. 1:1-11.

"Prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day."

ALTHO the book of Nehemiah is a historical one – that is to say, not a prophetic or inspired one – we are nevertheless to regard its historical presentations as having been supervised by divine providence and intended for the instruction and edification of God's people. In these respects it corresponds to the books of Judges, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, Esther, etc., and in these respects it differs from the prophetic books which present to us directly the words of divine inspiration. This book is sometimes recognized as the Second book of Ezra, because its narrative is the sequel to that of the book of Ezra. Undoubtedly, however, Nehemiah was the writer of the major part of it, additions being made of other features by some other historian. Portions of the book are apparently copied from the State archives and written in the third person, while Nehemiah evidently was the writer of the portion presented in the first person.

Dr. Howard Crosby calls attention to the fact that altho the Book of Nehemiah is strictly historical, it nevertheless in a very remarkable manner outlines or shadows in various parts a Christian's experience. He says: –

"It is interesting to see how admirably the Book of Nehemiah tells the story of the soul's renewal. In the first chapter is the conviction and confession of sin and unrighteousness; in the second, the determination to rebuild with God's grace; in the third, the actual rebuilding of the soul's defences in sanctification; in the fourth, the attacks upon the soul from without; in the fifth, the assaults from within; in the sixth, the sly temptations of the Adversary, in the guise of reasonableness; in the seventh, the successful accomplishment of the spiritual work and ordering of the soul in godliness; in the eighth,

the study of the Word; in the ninth, the Christian's faith confessing its weakness; in the tenth, the covenant relationship emphasized; in the eleventh, the systematizing of the advanced soul in the godly life; in the twelfth, the thankful acknowledgement of God in everything; and in the thirteenth, the sad exhibition of the Christian's fall, and need of the renewed influences of the spirit. When, on the close examination of the book, we see how exactly this outline is filled up, we can hardly believe that such a spiritual application was not intended in the recorded history. It is probable that Bunyan took his *Mansoul* from the study of this book."

Nehemiah informs us that he held the office of Cup-bearer to the king of Persia, at his palace, Shushan – the principal of the three Persian capitals. In ancient times the Cup-bearer was a confidential favorite with the monarch, highly trusted; he had access to the king's presence continually, and not merely on state occasions, as the political officers. His office was in the nature of trusted friend and counsellor, through whom instructions were sent, not only to the king's household servants, but also to ministers of the realm. Such trusted servants were expected to have a general oversight, especially of the household, and to be able to guarantee the king against conspiracies upon his life; he was expected to taste of the king's food in his presence as an assurance or guarantee that it had not been poisoned. In presenting wine to the king, it was the custom for this officer to pour out a sample for himself, and from this probably originated the title of Cup-bearer. Somewhat similarly, in Great Britain, various persons of high rank are known as **[R2525 : page 233]** Chamberlain, Master of the Household, etc.

It may be inferred from various statements of chapter five, especially vss. 16-18, that Nehemiah had inherited great wealth, and we must think of him as a young man, gifted, educated, and highly honored by the monarch in the position which he held. That it was not impossible for Hebrews to occupy confidential and high positions in

the Persian empire is shown in the cases of Daniel, Esther and Mordecai.

We saw in a previous lesson (August 27) that those who returned to Jerusalem under the proclamation of Cyrus were for the most part the poorer of the captives who had not prospered exceedingly in the provinces of Babylonia. Nehemiah's parents had [R2525 : page 234] possibly been too comfortably situated and too prosperous to take a deep interest in the return. Nehemiah himself, as a young man in good position, had probably not given great thought to the fact that God's chosen nation was at this time for the most part a homeless people, and that the holy city was in a deplorable condition. Josephus informs us that while walking outside the city wall Nehemiah noticed some travel-stained strangers, was attracted to them by their Hebrew language, and conversing with them found one of them to be a relative of his, and that they had recently returned from Jerusalem, which they described as being in a deplorable condition.

The Lord evidently permitted this circumstance, which exercised a great influence upon the mind of Nehemiah, stirring up the naturally good soil of his heart not only to sympathy with his persecuted co-religionists at Jerusalem, but also to consider the whole question of Israel's rejection from divine favor, and the forewarnings of this rejection given in the Law and the prophets, and the promises of a return of divine favor with the return of Israel to a proper condition of heart. As he thought upon the question his entire nature was stirred, plowed to its very depths; and he resolved that he would not only pray the Lord for divine blessing upon the true holy city, but that he would consecrate himself and the wealth which God had committed to his care, and his favored confidential relationship with the king – all these he would devote to the answering of his own prayers.

He realized, however, that the work he was undertaking was of no small magnitude: he realized that to express to the king a sympathy for his own nation and its captive city might readily be misunderstood

to be a lack of loyalty, and that thus he might not only fail to have the king's favor and assistance in connection with the project, but might, on the other hand, arouse his opposition and enmity, not only against himself, but also against his people. And at that time for a Chamberlain to arouse his monarch's ill-will might readily mean, not merely his removal from office, but the confiscation of his property, or even the taking of his life.

With these facts before our minds, we not only gain an exalted opinion of Nehemiah's consecration to the Lord and the service of his people, but we also perceive the reasonableness, nay, the necessity, for his continuing in an attitude of mourning, fasting and praying, and waiting for the Lord to open a favorable opportunity for nearly four months before that opportunity came. – Neh. 1:1; 2:1.

The mourning probably came first; then followed the fasting, self-denial, self-correction, that he might know the better the mind of the Lord on the subject; then discerning what he concluded was the Lord's will in respect to himself, the use of his time, talent, influence and means in the relief of his brethren, and consecrating his all fully to this service, his mourning, fasting and praying continued until the day that the Lord opened to him the door of opportunity, thus accepting his offer, his sacrifice.

We may pause here to note the fact that all Christians to-day should have much of the spirit, the disposition, of Nehemiah. Being Israelites after the spirit and not after the flesh, their interest will chiefly be in the prosperity of spiritual Israel. Numbers of these, like Nehemiah, are still in Babylon, and a few of them, like him, possess wealth and influence there. Such as take note of the dishonor and contempt and abuse aroused against their faithful brethren will be touched with love and sympathy for the brethren. Their hearts will thus be turned longingly to look for the promises of God respecting spiritual Zion and her ultimate deliverance, and they will feel an earnest desire to be with and of the Lord's faithful ones, and such true

fellowship will make them ready to sacrifice their temporal interests in the Lord's cause as well as to fast and pray for it. Those with such a spirit will be sure to have an increase of divine favor which will permit them to sacrifice their all and to share the privations and oppositions to which their brethren are subject, and being in a right condition of heart they will appreciate this as being a great *privilege*, a great *honor*.

Such, however, will do wisely if they follow Nehemiah's course of earnest prayer and constant seeking for the opportunity which will permit them not only to make their sacrifice, but to make it most effectively as respects the Lord's cause.

Our previous studies on this subject showed us that the wall of Jerusalem had been considerably repaired after the return from Babylon, but this repair work had been discontinued by imperial decree because of the representations made by the rulers of the Samaritans, who, we remember, were provoked by the refusal of the Israelites to permit them to join in the work and to consider them as Israelites; subsequently this hatred was intensified by Israel's course in instructing the people that those who had married Samaritan wives had violated the divine command. We cannot doubt that the return of these wives would be taken as a gross insult by the Samaritans, who evidently felt that under all the circumstances they were at liberty to oppose these poor Jews in every way in their power, even resorting to open attacks upon the people and the breaking down of the walls, the burning of the gates, etc. They felt secure in this lawlessness, because the imperial government of Persia showed the Jews no favor. **[R2525 : page 235]**

However, we see that God used this very matter of trouble upon the Jews to raise up for them wealthy and friendly brethren yet in Babylon to come to their relief. Just so it is sometimes with the spiritual Israelite – the trials and difficulties which seem most discouraging and disadvantageous are often the very means which God employs for stirring up others of his people and bringing them

needed relief. This again emphasizes the lesson which is taught throughout this narrative of Nehemiah respecting trust in the divine supervision of his people's interests, and the propriety of our not only trusting God but seeking to cowork with him along the lines of his providence.

The condensed statement of Nehemiah's prayers which he furnishes us is interesting and instructive. The opening sentence reminds us of the opening statement of that which we designate the Lord's Prayer: "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name." It is an acknowledgment of the divine greatness and relatively of the petitioner's littleness. It is a recognition also of God's faithfulness: His name is honorable, his character is unassailable, his ways just and true. Nehemiah, after acknowledging God's faithfulness toward those who love and obey him, acknowledged that the entire difficulty which had led to all the trouble upon Israel resulted from their sins – their neglect of God and his promises, their failure to keep their part of the covenant.

And properly he included himself in this matter, for heretofore he had been like the others, chiefly careful for the things of this life, and tho doubtless honest and honorable in his dealings, he had been neglectful of the great promises of which he was an heir with the others of his nation. Altho he had not been sharing personally in the severe afflictions, he now shared them sympathetically with the faithful ones who had returned to the Land of Promise, and he might therefore voice a prayer for all. He summarizes the divine threatenings and promises expressed by Moses' lips (Deut. 28), expressing his thorough confidence in the Lord, that as the punishments predicted had been meted out to Israel as a people, so assuredly the promises of the regathering could be relied upon implicitly. – Rom. 11:29,32.

There are lessons here profitable to all Israelites indeed who are in trouble because of past unfaithfulness to their covenant. All such should remember that the very fact that their indifference and neglect

of the Lord has separated them from him according to the declaration of his Word, only proves the fact that God who is the same yesterday, to-day and forever is ready and willing to receive them back into harmony and favor if they but retrace their steps. To all such the Lord says, "Draw nigh unto me and I will draw nigh unto you."

Nehemiah's prayer reminds us also of the fact that Israel was not gathered at the first advent because as a nation they did not come into the attitude of heart here exemplified by Nehemiah. Had the whole nation been of Nehemiah's attitude at our Lord's first advent the gathering of the elect would have been accomplished there: the Bride class would have been selected from the twelve tribes, the Kingdom would have been established, and the work of blessing all the families of the earth would have begun there. But as we have already seen* the unreadiness of that nation resulted in their receiving a "double" of chastisement from the Lord – so that they have since received as long a period of punishment without favor as they previously received with favor. And now their "double" being ended, the Lord's message to [R2526 : page 235] them is, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people; speak ye comfortably unto Jerusalem, and cry unto her that her appointed time is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned, for she hath received at the Lord's hands *double* for all her sins." (Isa. 40:1,2.) Now the recovery of Israel is due and is in progress, and as soon as the spiritual Israel is complete and glorified the light will begin to shine upon fleshly Israel. – Rom. 11:25-27.

*See MILLENNIAL DAWN, VOL. II., Chap. 7.

Thus we see that Nehemiah's prayer has not yet been fully answered. The Lord has not yet gathered the natural seed of Abraham, who have faith in him, from the uttermost parts of the earth: but we do see that he is ready to do this quickly now, so soon as he shall have gathered the spiritual seed to heavenly conditions through the first resurrection. The gathering of natural Israel will not of course include all Jews, but merely such of that blinded people as maintain their Abrahamic faith in the divine promises. And these doubtless will be

gathered through a great time of trouble through which fleshly Israel may still expect to pass. Their favor-time has commenced, and hence the "Zionist movement," but it will be requisite as a part of the favor, which shall bring them near to the Lord and back to the Land of Promise, that they shall endure great persecutions, from which the Lord shall deliver them.

But altho Nehemiah's prayer was not fulfilled on the large scale he had before his mind, because the Lord's due time had not yet come and because the people were not then ready for such blessing, nevertheless his prayer was *answered*, for he was granted the desired opportunity to devote himself, his influence, his wealth and his time to the Lord's cause. And even tho the results were far from what he expected, [R2526 : page 236] we may be sure that they brought to his heart a rest and a blessing: and we may be sure also that they brought him into that condition of mind which was pleasing to the Lord, and we may reasonably expect that Nehemiah will be one of the class mentioned by the Apostle in Heb. 11:39,40, for whom is reserved a share in the earthly ministration of the Millennial age under the glorified Church.

A lesson for the spiritual Israelite in this is that altho his prayers may not be answered in the manner he had anticipated, nevertheless he may rest assured that all things are working together for good to him; and that the Lord's way eventually will work out a far more exceeding and an eternal weight of glory. Therefore let us, as spiritual Israelites, perform our consecration and pour out before the Lord our prayers in harmony with his promise, and realize that in the end, when we shall know as we are known, we will see clearly that the Lord was answering our prayers in the most efficacious manner.
