

twenty-seven feet apart, so that the entire palace must have enclosed a space of nearly three hundred feet square. At this great palace Daniel saw one of his visions (Dan. 8. 2); and here Xerxes, the Ahasuerus of the Book of Esther, "sat on the throne of his kingdom" at the feast described in Esther 1. 2-9.

**2. Hanani.** Not the priest mentioned in chap. 12. 36, but Nehemiah's own brother, as appears from the language of chap. 7. 2. **I asked them.** As one deeply interested in the condition of the fatherland and the Jewish people still remaining there. **Escaped . . . left.** These two words, nearly synonymous, denote two distinct conceptions of the Jews then abiding in Jerusalem and the towns of Judah. The first word points to their "escape" from the land of exile. Although multitudes preferred to remain in Babylon, those who returned to the Holy Land were regarded as a body of people delivered from captivity, and so escaping the bondage which had come upon their race by reason of exile. The word **left** points yet more specifically to such as survived the trials to which the new community at Jerusalem had been exposed from the time of Cyrus until this twentieth year of Artaxerxes Longimanus. All who returned to Jerusalem **escaped** from the bondage of exile, but not all of these survived the hardships and persecutions of the troublous times.

**4. Wall broken . . . gates burned.** Some critics—supposing that the breaking down of the walls and burning of the gates of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, more than half a century before, could have been no news to Nehemiah—maintain that the destruction here referred to must have been caused by some more recent calamity not now on record. But it is unnecessary to suppose that this part of the report of the men out of Judah was "news" to Nehemiah. The desolate condition of Jerusalem is incidentally mentioned as showing how the Jews there were **in great affliction and reproach**. It is unaccountable that, if the walls of Jerusalem had been rebuilt and afterward destroyed a second time, no mention of such facts is traceable in history. The walls had remained in ruins since the beginning of the exile, and this fact was doubtless known to Nehemiah; but not until these tidings of the great suffering and reproach of his people were reported to him did he feel the keenness of the reproach which such a state of things at Jerusalem involved. Hence the prayer that follows.

**5. I beseech thee.** The prayer of Nehemiah deserves critical study as a model of blended adoration, invocation, confession, supplication, and confident appeal. Note the propriety and felicity of addressing Jehovah as the **God of heaven, the great and the terrible**. The facts which pressed on Nehemiah's memory and thought at the time most naturally prompted such

a form of words. But the great and terrible God is also one who **keepeth covenant and mercy**.

**8. Thy servant Moses.** Various passages from the Books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, here appropriated by Nehemiah, show that those portions of the Pentateuch were then recognized as of Mosaic origin.

**11. This man.** Alluding to the king, whom, though exalted to all but absolute power, he still knows to be only a man, and subject to the God of heaven. **Cupbearer.** The *mashgeh*, translated "butler" in Gen. 40. 1, 2, 5. An office of dignity. Rabshakeh (2 Kings 18. 17) was chief cupbearer in the Assyrian court.

### The Lesson Council.

**Question 1.** *In what sense were the Jews the people of God?*

They were the people of God in a distinctive sense: 1. As his chosen people, with special favor and protection from their enemies. God gave the possessions of the heathen to be their possessions, driving out their enemies before them. 2. To the Jews pertained the Church with all its moral and religious institutions and benefits. To them God revealed his will, and to them he delivered the oracles of his truth (Rom. 3. 1, 2; 9. 4, 5). They were first to have the Gospel preached unto them.

**Question 2.** *Were the Gentile nations any less the people of God than the Jews? What was the difference between their relation to God and that of the Jews?*

No. "God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10. 34, 35; Rom. 2. 11), hence not of nations. His love, purpose (Eph. 3. 11; Mal. 1. 11), and absolute relations (Rom. 10. 12, 13) are the same toward all (Rom. 2. 10, 11; 3. 29). Yet his real relations were not always the same. To the Jews it was a covenant relation, hence special. God's chosen instrument in bringing salvation to man was the Jews. He covenanted with them (Gen. 17. 2-16). The Jews pledged fidelity. God promised to be their King. This covenant relation was for special ends; therefore, to-day all are alike before him (Acts 10. 9-48; 11. 1-18; Gal. 3. 28).

**Question 3.** *What traits of character in Nehemiah should we consider as examples for us to follow?*

1. Patriotism. Though raised in a foreign land and living in the palace of a foreign king, he is nevertheless solicitous for the welfare of the land of his fathers. "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget her cunning." 2. Tenderness of heart. "I sat down and wept." Nehemiah was no weakling. He could superintend the building of a city's walls, lead an army, persevere in the