

lem. Neh. 7. 2. **Men of Judah.** Revised Version, "out of Judah." They had come from Jerusalem, journey not in the direct line across the Syrian desert, but northward to Tiphshah, and thence down the Euphrates River, making in all nearly twelve hundred miles, and occupying about two months. **I asked them.** Though living at ease and in honor, Nehemiah was not without interest in his depressed people, for they were the people of God. **The Jews that had escaped.** Though nearly ninety years had elapsed since the return from the exile, the Jews of Palestine were still known as "those who had escaped." (1) *We should ever have in our heart a love for God's people and an interest in God's cause.*

3. The remnant.... are in great affliction. This was due, partly to the enmity of the people around Judea, partly, perhaps, to misfortune, poor crops, and hard times, but most of all, as is shown by Nehemiah's narrative and Malachi's prophecy, to the apathy and religious neglect of the people themselves. **The wall.... is broken down.** The wall had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers one hundred and thirty-seven years before. It is not known whether it had remained in ruins since, or whether it had been destroyed again by enemies. An Oriental city is utterly defenseless without a wall; and until the wall was rebuilt Jerusalem could be no more than a village. To rebuild the wall, then, was the first step toward making it once more the capital. (2) *So Christ's Church, the earthly Jerusalem, needs to be so protected that foes shall be kept out and friends kept safe.*

4. When I heard. He may have known the general condition of the city before, but the recital gave the knowledge an intense reality. **I sat down and wept.** He spent a season of retirement in religious exercises expressive of sorrow. **Fasted, and prayed.** This fast was probably not absolute abstinence from food, but a denial of pleasure and of luxuries, keeping the body in fit condition for prayer. **The God of heaven.** This is a conception of God which no doubt existed among the Israelites' every age, but is especially prominent in the later books of the Old Testament, when God's people were widely scattered. (3) *Our prayers should not be altogether for ourselves, but should take in the general interests of God's cause.*

5. And said. This verse expresses the general tenor, not the precise language, of Nehemiah's prayers during four months before he made his request of King Artaxerxes, that he might be allowed to go to Judea. **The great and terrible God.** Notice that it is the "terrible" God, who at the same time keeps the covenant and mercy. There is no contradiction between these two clauses. One tells us of God's greatness and power; the other assures us that all that greatness and power will be used in the fulfillment of his promises. (4) *The mightier that God is, the safer his children are.* **Covenant** refers to God's definite promises; **mercy** to his loving character, which gives more than is pledged. **For them that love him.** God's love is freely given to all men, however wicked they may be. But only those who give their love in return are in condition to accept the blessings of his covenant. **Give us his commandments.** Those who love beyond what a rightly constituted nature would freely give. (5) *Teacher, call attention to these two great demands and urge them upon your scholars.*

6. Let thine ear.... thine eyes. No enlightened person supposes that God is in human form, with veritable eyes and ears; but some such figurative conception as this is necessary to our conditions of knowledge. **The prayer of thy servant.** Nehemiah's prayer was rather a recalling of God's promises and a confession of his people's sin than any specific petition. **Confess the sins.** Rev. Ver., "while I confess the sins." This was needful, for Nehemiah saw that the troubles of his people were in their own wandering from God. **I and my father's house.** From the prominence given to his "father's house," some have concluded, though doubt-

fully, that Nehemiah belonged to the royal line of Judah. (6) *Whoever comes before God should come humbly, not proudly.*

7. We have dealt very corruptly. Nehemiah saw very clearly, what most of his people were slow to own, that Israel had been untrue to the covenant and deserted all its discipline at the hands of God. **The commandments.... statutes.... judgments.** General terms expressing the law, and referring not only the revelation through Moses, but also to the current of spiritual teaching by the prophets, which was considered as explanatory of the law. **Thy servant Moses.** It is evident that Nehemiah was familiar with the Pentateuch or five books of Moses, for he refers to it as well known, and also quotes from it.

8. Remember, I beseech thee. God does not need to be reminded of his words, yet he desires us, for our own sakes, to remind him of them. **The word.** He owns sakes, freely. Deut. 30. 1-5, verses which contain the warning and the promise of God side by side. **If ye transgress, I will scatter you.** This had been accomplished, Israel had transgressed, and was now scattered widely among the nations.

9. But if ye turn. Nehemiah is anxious that the promise shall be fulfilled as thoroughly as the warning had been; and finds in the fulfillment of the threatening a ground of hope for mercy. **When men turn, then God turns.** Keep my commandments. The best evidence of turning to God is a willingness to do his will. (8) *If you have resolved to be a Christian, then do will. If you have resolved that Christ would have you do, yet in every respect what Christ would have you do.*

10. Now these are thy.... people. The descendants of Jacob took a just pride in the fact that they were the covenant people, the chosen heritage of God among the nations. (9) *All that in the Old Testament is given to the Jew, in the New Testament is given to the Christian.* **Redeemed by thy great power.** The history of Israel was full of instances of God's power exerted in its behalf, at the Red Sea, at the river Jordan, in the conquest and the deliverances at every stage.

11. Prosper, I pray thee, thy servant. Nehemiah did not propose to let his interest in Judea and Jerusalem end with his prayers. He had formed a plan, which involved the surrender of his high office at the court, a long journey to Palestine, and a heavy task, at his own expense. His purpose was to rebuild the wall, and restore the state of Jerusalem, and he now prays for God's blessing upon his work. Nehemiah was not like those who pray eloquently for missions but do not give to them, or those who pray for revival without working for it. **Grant him mercy in the sight of this man.** His plan required the consent of King Artaxerxes to his leaving Shushan for a time at least, and his appointment as governor of Judea. **I was the king's cup-bearer.** An important office, since he had charge of all the wines for the royal household, and stood by the king's side at every meal. He was responsible for the wine, to see that it was not poisoned, and tasted it before handing the cup to the king. Very few, even of the highest nobles, were permitted to be so near the king; and the cup-bearer was often a trusted friend of the monarch, and a valued intercessor, since he could easily present petitions to him. Yet he esteemed it a privilege to give up his place that he might help his people, and the people of God. It will well repay the teacher and the scholar to read this book, and see how Nehemiah overcame. In the prosecution of his work of rebuilding the wall and restoring Jerusalem, seven hindrances: 1. The distance—1200 miles. 2. The poverty of the Jews. 3. Their discouraged, apathetic spirit. 4. Their miseries. 5. The opposition of the nobles. 6. The opposition of the people. 7. The general laxity of obedience to the law of God.

GOLDEN TEXT.

Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man. Psa. 108. 12.

LESSON HYMNS.

No. 133, Dominion Hymnal.

What a Friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!

HOME READINGS.

- M. Nehemiah's prayer. Neh. 1. 1-11.
- Tu. God's covenant with Israel. Exod. 19. 1-13.
- W. The covenant broken. Exod. 32. 1-18.
- Th. Sin confessed. Psa. 51. 1-19.
- F. The wages of sin. Rom. 6. 7-23.
- S. Turning from sin. Acts 16. 25-40.
- S. Praying for help. Psa. 108. 1-13.