

"at the end of certain days" will be interpreted as the close of his period of attendance at the court. According to this interpretation we may infer that after visiting Jerusalem in the year 445 and introducing his reforms he returned to Susa, where he remained until the year 433, when, upon hearing of the condition of his brethren at Jerusalem, he obtained permission to visit Jerusalem a second time. Furthermore, it must be borne in mind that the only object he had in view in visiting Jerusalem in the year 445 was to rebuild the walls of the city, and as this was a task which could be accomplished within a brief period of time, it is scarcely possible that he could have thought of his absence as anything but temporary. Indeed, from Neh. ii. 6 it seems almost certain that he did regard it as such, because the king asked him plainly how long his journey was to be, and when he proposed to return; and although Nehemiah does not give us his answer, he yet states that the king upon hearing it *was pleased* to grant his request. It would look on the face of the narrative, then, as if his leave of absence was only intended to cover a brief period. Furthermore, the events recorded in Neh. ii-xii do not seem to call for a longer space of time than one year.

This interpretation of Neh. xiii: 6 is not forced. It is a perfectly legitimate one, does no violence to the text, is in harmony with what seems to us the only possible exegesis of Chap. ii: 5-6, and at the same time relieves us of the necessity of supposing that in the brief space of time included in the term "*certain days*" the people of Jerusalem relapsed into all their old abuses.

It is clear here, we think, that the years 444-443 give us the period of Nehemiah's absence at the court of the Persian king. And it was during this period that the words of Malachi, as we find them recorded in the book which bears his name, were uttered. The exact date of the prophecy we cannot give but inasmuch as a considerable number of years must have elapsed after the renewal of the covenant under Ezra and Nehemiah before the condition of things recorded could have become possible, we must place it somewhere near