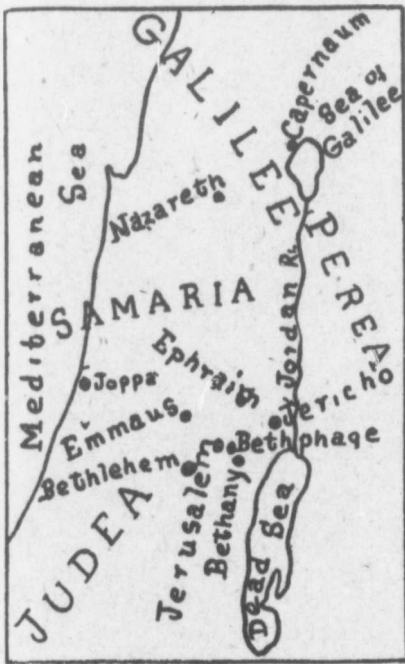


against Xerxes, was the real king, but his ambition overreached itself and he disappeared to make way for another aspirant to power, one Megabyzus. For nearly 40 years Megabyzus was the chief advisor of the ir-resolute king at home and in his long struggle with Athenian soldiers in Egypt and Athenian ships on the Mediterranean. More than once he was disgraced and banished but the incompetent king could not get on without him.

With such a king, the Persian empire was only prevented from falling to pieces by the excellent organization which Darius had established about B.C. 520 and that held the empire together for more than a century and a half. All national spirit had been ground out of the people of the empire by the repeated conquests of Assyrian armies, and they were glad to live quietly under the lenient, if somewhat capricious, rule of Persian satraps.

THE GEOGRAPHY LESSON



The Persian province of Judea corresponded practically in extent to the kingdom of Judah before the captivity. Roughly speaking, its size would be about forty miles square. It comprises the southern part of Palestine with its centre in Jerusalem. Judah in the time of our lesson was much more fertile than at present, for it still had its forests, but at its best was a rocky province, broken here and there by fertile stretches. The great events of the Old Testament time occurred here, and here Christ was born, was crucified and rose again from the dead.

"Judah was far more inaccessible than the Northern tribes. Protected on the east by the wilderness, on the south by the Negeb, itself more or less of a wilderness, on the west by the low hills of the Shephelah, by the valley that divides it from the Central Range and the slopes of the Central Range itself, on the north by Benjamin with its fortresses, it lay far less open to invasion. When it was held by real defenders, it was necessary that the invaders should first master the surrounding country, and then deliver their attack across three of its borders."

THE LESSON APPLIED

This is no time for frivolity, v. 1. Nehemiah was unable to indulge himself while his people were in dire straits. Think of the awful struggle going on to-day on the fields of Europe. Think of the troubles of little boys and girls in Belgium, Poland and Armenia. This is a day for living soberly and for walking humbly before God. Dr. Joseph Parker tells about a man who in the time of the Punic Wars had put a chaplet on his empty head

and put his head out of the window to look at the difficulties and hazards of the people and of how the Romans compelled him to remove his chaplet because it was unseemly that any one should flaunt his individual joys in the face of such public sorrows.

Opportunity sometimes makes us fearful, v. 2. This was just the chance that Nehemiah was looking for, but when it came he was sore afraid. We, too, dream of life and