

the Jews that had escaped, etc.; that is, "the Jews in the land of Judea ("Judah") as distinguished from those in Babylon and dispersed in other countries." (Cambridge Bible.) *In the province*; of Judea, now part of the Persian empire. *In great affliction and reproach*. See Geikie in From the Library. *Wall of Jerusalem . . . broken down . . . gates . . . burned*. This answers the second part of Nehemiah's question. The wall had been partly rebuilt, but the work had been stopped, (see Ezra 4 : 12) and it was still in ruins, as Nebuchadnezzar had left it, 2 Kgs. 25 : 10. "In those days, rather one may say, in those countries, of disorder, a city without locked gates and lofty walls was no city at all." (Dean Stanley.)

II. The Prayer of God's Servant, 4-11.

Vs. 4, 5. *When I heard*. "The moment he heard of the deplorable condition of Jerusalem, his resolution was formed to seek leave from the king, though he had to wait several months for the opportunity." (A. B. Davidson.) *Wept, and mourned certain days*; during four months (v. 1 and ch. 2 : 1), pondering the while what he could do, earnestly asking guidance of God, and waiting for a favorable opportunity. *Fasted*; an expression of his intense earnestness. *And prayed*; constantly, day and night, during those long months of delay. The One to whom Nehemiah prayed was : the *Lord God of heaven*, the unseen spiritual God, so far above the dead idols that could be seen; *the great and terrible God*, whom His true worshippers approach with reverent awe, and who produces unspeakable fear in His enemies; *that keepeth covenant* ("agreement," "promises") *and mercy*. Even the present condition of His people was a fulfilment of God's word (see Deut., chs. 28 to 30). Such a God could and would answer Nehemiah's prayers, and He will answer ours. *For them that love him and observe his commandments*. None but the obedient can enjoy God's best blessings. To give them to others would encourage sin, and so add to the misery of the world.

Vs. 6, 7. *Let thine ear . . . be attentive . . . thine eyes open*. With God to hear is to answer; to see is to help. *Hearken unto the prayer . . . day and night, for . . . Israel* (Rev. Ver.); an illustration of what we owe to the intercession

of others for us, and of our duty to intercede for them. (Compare Abraham's prayer on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah, Gen. 18 : 16-33, and our Lord's for Peter, Luke 22 : 32.) *I confess the sins* (Rev. Ver.). God's people have only themselves, not Him, to blame for their sad condition. *I and my father's house have sinned*. We share the sin of those around us, (1) if we are influenced by the same spirit; (2) if we fail to do what we can to prevent sin in others. *Have not kept the commandments . . . statutes . . . judgments*. Compare Deut. 5 : 31; 6 : 1; 11 : 1. These terms describe "the divine law from every point of view,—what God has commanded, the laws He has enacted and recorded on the statute book, His wise judgments or decisions as to right and wrong." (Peloubet.)

Vs. 8, 9. *Remember*. The father in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke, ch. 15) never forgot the wanderer. Much less will the Heavenly Father ever forget His children. *If ye turn unto me*. Only then is it possible and wise for God to bless, though He is always willing to bless. *Outcasts . . . in the uttermost part of the heaven* (Rev. Ver.); driven away from their own into distant and strange countries, according to God's word, for their sin (see Deut. 28 : 25). *Will bring them unto the place that I have chosen*. That "the place . . . is Jerusalem and the temple at Jerusalem is beyond all doubt." (Cambridge Bible.) (Compare 1 Kgs. 8 : 29; 11 : 36.)

Vs. 10, 11. *Thy servants . . . thy people . . . redeemed* (Nehemiah is apparently thinking of the Exodus from Egypt); a strong plea. The people in such a woful plight are God's very own. Surely He will not leave them to their foes. *By thy great power . . . strong hand*. Compare Ex. 32 : 11. Lesson I, Third Quarter, Sennacherib's Invasion (2 Chron. 32 : 9-23), is a striking illustration. *Who delight to fear thy name* (Rev. Ver.). There is overflowing joy as well as reverent fear in true religious service. For God—His "name" means just all that it He is—is so loving and gentle, so wise and true. *Mercy in the sight of this man*; that is, Artaxerxes, of whom he was about to make a request on behalf of his people. There was reason for anxiety, so uncertain and ca-